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Joseph Ritson: a critical biography.

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JOSEPH RITSON:
A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY

BY

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

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PREFACE.

In the past historians of literature concerned themselves primarily with the great men. Their lives were carefully and minutely recorded while the minor figures were passed over in silence or with superficial notice. This is necessarily true of the more general type of history today. But within recent years a revision of literary history has been taking place as a result of such studies as the present. The student of literature has come to recognize that the true tenor of an age is frequently more accurately reflected in the lesser men, who were prominent in their own day but who have been forgotten by posterity, than in those who have achieved more lasting fame. Especially is this true in periods of remarkable transition, such as the latter half of the eighteenth century. Among the minor figures of that period Joseph Ritson was not the least important in his influence upon his own day and upon subsequent literature.

By his extensive ballad collections he contributed materially to the growing interest in medieval poetry. As the precursor of the scientific study of popular poetry and of modern standards of editorship he was an efficient pathfinder. For these offices posterity owes much to him. He was an eccentric character and his idiosyncrasies have been exploited to the neglect of his valuable services. Within recent years his contributions to scholarship have been more generously acknowledged, but an adequate estimate was impossible because so little was known of him.

Joseph Haslewood's 'Life and Publications of the late Joseph Ritson', London, 1824, is little more than a chronology of his publications. Biographical material in this little volume, hardly more than a pamphlet, is scant, and the critical judgments are colored by the author's expressed desire to clear from censure the name of 'honest Joseph Ritson.' The 'Memoir' by Sir Harris Nicolas, prefixed to 'The Letters of Joseph Ritson', 2 vols., London, 1833, is the only biography that approaches completeness. The material is taken largely from the letters, supplemented by the personal reminiscences of Ritson's nephew and executor, Joseph Frank. From these sources he prepared an excellent personal characterization, but he made no attempt at a critical biography. Indeed it would have been impossible, nearly a century ago, to give an accurate estimate of Ritson's services to literature and scholarship. The Life in the 'Dictionary of National Biography' is based mainly upon the 'Memoir'.

In the following pages I have endeavored to give an accurate account of Ritson's life and publications. With the aid of existing biographical material, contemporary magazine notices and critical reviews, and certain unpublished manuscripts and letters, I have tried to bring him into proper perspective and to estimate his influence in his own day and his importance for subsequent literature. I have deemed it advisable to carry the biographical narrative along with the consideration of the works, for his life has little interest apart from his publications. His works fall naturally into two distinct divisions: those dealing

with his legal profession: those concerned with literary antiquities. The latter class further subdivides into Shakespeare criticisms and collections of poetry. It is inevitable that the chapters should overlap to a greater or less degree.

I am indebted to the authorities of Gray's Inn, of the library of the University of Edinburgh, of the Bodleian library, and of the British Museum for many courtesies. To Mr. Marsden J. Perry of Providence, Rhode Island, and to Charles Davis, Esq. of Kew Gardens, Surrey, my sincere thanks are due for the privilege of using Ritson's letters and manuscripts. The subject of this study was suggested by Professor S.P.Sherman, of the English Department of the University of Illinois, and it has been prepared under his stimulating direction. To him and to Professor H.S.V. Jones, who has also read the manuscript and offered helpful criticisms, my obligations are manifold and can never be adequately acknowledged.

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CHAPTER I.

Early Years, 1752-1775.

Joseph Ritson, second son of Joseph Ritson and Jane Gibson, was born Oct. 2, 1752, at Stockton-upon-Tees, Durham.¹⁾ Of a family of nine children, Joseph and four daughters alone survived infancy. A daughter, Anne, married Robert Frank of Stockton and became the mother of Joseph Frank, Ritson's protégé and heir, to whom posterity is indebted for most of the facts of the critic's life ²⁾ and for the publication of many

1. In Nichols's 'Literary Anecdotes', viii, 133n, Ritson is designated 'a native of Stockton in Yorkshire'. In the next volume, ix, 686, his birthplace is given as Stockton-upon-Tees; and in 'Literary Illustrations', viii, 588 this statement is corrected thus: 'Mr. Ritson was born at Stockton, ten miles from York, not at Stockton-upon-Tees'. I have discovered no corroboration of this statement. On the other hand there is ample evidence that Ritson was a native of Durham. He did not employ the full appellation, 'Stockton-upon-Tees', in his correspondence, resting content with 'Stockton'. But he frequently connects Stockton and Durham (See 'Letters', I, 36, 56, 122, 148, 174, and *passim*) and never Stockton and York. Moreover he left three unpublished MSS. relating to 'Stockton in the county of Durham'. One of these, 'Wills drawn by the late Ralph Bradley Esq. of Stockton in the county of Durham', is conclusive evidence that his early master was a resident of Stockton-upon-Tees. Inquiry concerning the parish register of Stockton has, at this writing, brought no response.

2. Frank supplied most of the material for Harris Nicolas's 'The Letters of Joseph Ritson, Esq. Edited chiefly from originals in the possession of his nephew. To which is prefixed a Memoir of the author', 2 vols, London, 1883. Upon this and Joseph Haslewood's 'Some account of the life and publications of the late Josiah Ritson, Esq.' London, 1824, is based Mr. Sidney Lee's account of Ritson in the Dictionary of National Biography. Frank names the Ritson children as follows: Christopher, who died an infant; Joseph; John, Sarah, and Elizabeth, all of whom died young; Anne; Sarah, who married Jonathan Brown of Liverpool;

of his manuscripts. The family name, according to Ritson's 'Memoranda' a corruption of Richardson,¹⁾ was of considerable antiquity in Westmoreland and Cumberland, occurring in the parish register of Lowther at its commencement in 1550. Antiquarian though he was, Ritson was able to trace his pedigree with certainty only as far back as a great-grandfather Christopher Ritson, who died in 1703. The family belonged to the poor but respectable yeomanry of the north of England where it had held property for four generations. The elder Ritson seems to have lived always in very straitened circumstances, and his son's condition was little improved by inheriting from an uncle some property at Hartlepool in addition to the poor family estate at Stockton. His property was the source of considerable annoyance throughout his life, the crowning vexation coming near the end of his days when unfortunate speculation had reduced him to penury and, being unable to realize anything from the sale of his houses, he was forced to dispose of a part of his library to meet his obligations.

Jane, the wife of Thomas Thompson, of ^{Great} St. Strickland: and Mary. A Mrs. Kirby, a life-long friend of the family, whose remarks are reported in an unpublished letter of H.C. Selby to Bishop Percy (See Appendix B), declares that the first child was a daughter who died insane about the close of the eighteenth century. If this assertion is to be accredited the family register must be increased to ten.

1. See Nicolas, n.ii: 'Richardson, Richison, Richson, Ricson, Ritson'. Whether there is any authority other than personal fancy for this evolution is very doubtful.

Joseph Ritson, sen^{or}, was a corn grower in very modest circumstances.¹⁾ He seems to have owned nothing but the house he lived in and to have been forced to a hard life to support his large family. The general discontent of the agriculturist class and the disregard of the farmer by the merchant are reflected in his life. During his last illness, Robinson, the Stockton corn dealer with whom he had life-long business relations, refused to make a final settlement of their affairs, thus increasing his personal anxiety and making more gloomy the already dark prospects of the family. A letter written by the son, March 3, 1777, from London, voices his love for his father, his concern for the family, and his indignation at Robinson's unfeeling conduct. 'Heaven knows how much I have all along pleased myself with thinking I should be able in a few years to render you some assistance towards making you easy and happy in your old age in return for the education and indulgence you bestowed on me in my youth. . . . I am sorry to hear Mr. Robinson should refuse you the small comfort of having your affairs in some degree settled: on such an occasion as this his behavior is unfeeling and inhuman to the highest degree. . . . My heart bleeds to think of the distressed condition the whole family is in. I would to God I could be with

1. At one time he was a menial servant to a Stockton tobacconist, and at the time of his marriage served one Robinson, a prominent corn merchant of that place.

you for a day - but alas! I should only add to your confusion. May heaven assist you with patience and resignation in your afflictions. I crave your blessing and earnestly commend myself to your remembrance. . . . '1) The father died, at no very advanced age, early in the year 1778. Joseph was then struggling for a livelihood in London, unable in any material way to assist the family at Stockton.

Jane Gibson, at the time of her marriage, was a servant in the family of Robinson, in whose service her husband was also engaged. It is not probable that she continued long as a bread winner, for the burdens of her own family and home must soon have demanded all her attention. An uneducated peasant woman, she bestowed upon her family the simple and unaffected devotion characteristic of her class. The children maintained for her and for each other deep and permanent affection. It was in relation to his mother that the stolid and undemonstrative Joseph betrayed his finer sensibilities. The illness which terminated in her death began in the spring of 1780. On May 5th of that year Joseph wrote to her: 'I have so few, and those such slender connections with mankind, that if we lose you I shall not be very uneasy at anything that might happen to me.' In the same letter, in answer to a request from her as to what disposal she should make of her small belongings, he generously says: 'It is very much my wish

that you should dispose of everything you have to leave in favor of Nanny and her child (Anne Frank and Joseph).¹) During the course of the summer he attempted to regale her with accounts of the London riots and unrising among the lower classes and she invariably replied with solicitous concern for his health and personal safety. In November 1780 she died, and the love which Joseph had bestowed upon her seemed immediately to be diverted to his sister and her young son, for whom he had an affection almost paternal throughout the remainder of his life.

Life in the Ritson home must have been simple and affectionate; the necessity for the daily practice of economy in the material comforts of life in no way decreased but rather augmented the mutual love and sympathy of the family. Only one element, the religious atmosphere characteristic of the English middle and lower class families, seems to have been lacking. There is no evidence in the lives of the children so far as they are known, nor in their letters, to indicate Christian training. Neither is there any token in the early life of hostility to religious matters. The home seems only to have been non-religious, not irreligious. Joseph Ritson, reared in such a home, was no unnatural product of his environment. That there was a distinctly human side to his character, no one who has taken the trouble to look into his correspondence will deny. Yet the oft repeated remarks of cynical critics, who would paint him as an ogre who

1. 'Letters', I. 12, 13.

never fed on the milk of human kindness, make it necessary to point out that, however virulent and sarcastic he may have been towards certain editorial malefactors, he was, to his friends and family, a singularly generous, kind-hearted, and sympathetic man.

Ritson's formal education was limited. His only school-master was the Reverend John Thompson of Stockton, afterwards vicar of Warden in Northumberland. It is reported that he often spoke of Ritson as one of his best scholars and was accustomed to relate some anecdotes indicative, even in his youth, of those mental eccentricities for which he was afterwards so noted.¹⁾ Elsewhere he has been described as 'clever at his books and an apt scholar.' As a lad at school he constantly shunned the company of other boys. He endeavored to associate with the girls but they avoided him as much as possible, and he was consequently a half-voluntary outcast. Being much alone he grew morose and secretive and could be dislodged from his meditations by only one or two girls whom he secretly feared.²⁾

It has been said of Ritson that he was 'Totally unacquainted with the Greek and Latin languages',³⁾ and again, that he was 'ignorant of Greek and self-taught in Latin.'⁴⁾ He knew

1. Memoirs of Ritson, in Brewster's 'History of Stockton', 1829, p.370.

2. Mrs. Kirby claims the distinction of being able to do anything she pleased with the eccentric youth, 'he was so much afraid of her.' See unpublished letters of H.C.Selby to Bishop Percy given in Appendix B.

3. Review of 'Homer's Hymn to Venus', Gentleman's Magazine. 1803. 73,ii.p.1031.

4. DeQuincey's 'Works', ed. Masson, 1896. vol. VI.p. 23n.

no Greek and seems never to have felt his ignorance of it a handicap in his work.¹⁾ At any rate he was very emphatic in urging his nephew not to 'waste his time' in studying it. His estimate of the value of the ancient languages is clearly stated in a letter to his charge, June 4, 1785: 'You should pay all possible attention to Latin and writing. I do not apprehend Mr. Pattison can put you into Greek this summer, but if he should, I desire that you may not waste your time in acquiring any more knowledge of that language, than consists in reading it with facility from a familiarity with the characters, though you should not understand a word. Latin will be useful to you, not Greek, and I beg you will pay no regard to any one who tells you otherwise.'²⁾

But Ritson was certainly familiar with the Latin language. Its rudiments, at least, were made familiar by composition and construing at Thompson's parish school. Although he may not have been critically skilled, he made constant use of it in his literary labors. Many of his sources exist only in that language, and his quotations from the Roman writers are apt and numerous.

In these school days Ritson must have begun to cultivate the interest in history, old plays, songs and ballads, which later

1. The only remark which might be construed as expressing remorse at his ignorance of the classics appears in a letter to Robert Harrison, Aug. 22, 1795. He is lamenting the inefficiency of the modern writers of ancient history: 'Did we but all understand Greek and Latin as well as you do . . . my historian. . . should not be suffered to write a line . . . ' 'Letters', II. 99.

2. 'Letters', I. 102.

became his hobby and finally the absorbing interest of his life. Writing in 1780 to his six year old nephew he says: 'I have sent you a few books, &c, such as I was most entertained with and instructed by, when I was at your age: and I hope they will answer as good a purpose, if not a better to yourself You will find some few plays, and other things, which you may like better, perhaps, and know more of as you grow bigger.'¹⁾ The next year he sends him 'a history of England, and a little book of childish songs', and commends him for 'getting by heart so excellent a poem as Chevy Chase.'²⁾ A few months later he sends a collection of prints, pencils, and paints. 'The prints are mostly such as I was very fond of when I was rather older than you are: and the drawing book I still think a very pretty one.' At the same time he commends 'Don Quixote', 'which is one of the best books ever written', and Mother Goose's Melody, which is 'an excellent thing.'³⁾ By the time Frank is seven years old Ritson advises him to write verses on the Mother Goose order, adding significantly: 'I regret nothing so much as that I did not make a practise of committing all such little things to writing the moment I heard them.'⁴⁾ His early education, so far as it went, was thorough, but advancement was largely due to his own unaided efforts. In

1. 'Letters', I.11.
2. Ibid. I.20.
3. Ibid. I.27.
4. Ibid. I.42.

later years he felt keenly the lack of intelligent and sympathetic guidance in his formative period, and endeavored to supply this want in the life of his young nephew.

Even though we may be allowed to conjecture that the elder Ritson desired to give his son the advantages of a college education, such a thing was out of the question. There was a large family to support, and in that day the poor farmer had great difficulty in obtaining fair treatment at the hands of the merchant. Accordingly Joseph was put to work at an early age. It was perhaps just as well that he remained at home. As a youth he was sensitive, studious, and inclined to be secretive. At Stockton he had opportunity for private reading, and intimate daily contact with his fellows served as an antidote to the eccentric tendencies of his nature.

Being designed for the law, Joseph was first apprenticed to a solicitor Raisbeck of Stockton, a son-in-law to Robinson, the corn merchant with whom his father dealt. His stay with Raisbeck was probably short, and he was subsequently removed to the office of Ralph Bradley,¹⁾ a distinguished conveyancer of Stockton. Here he remained as long as he was a resident of Stockton. Bradley knew his business extremely well and kept his apprentices close at their tasks. In 1772 Ritson wrote to an acquaintance: 'I have

1. D.M.B. has 'Brindley'. Typographical error? The exact dates of these changes are not known. Mrs. Kirby says he was apprenticed to Bradley upon quitting the Latin school, and remained with him some year or two. See Appendix B.

never had a day nor the offer of a day (except Sunday) from my master since I entered his office.'¹⁾ Ralph Hoar and John Cra-thorne, apprentices to Bradley together with Ritson, both remained on terms of intimacy with him during life. Joseph applied himself with considerable diligence and evidently proved an apt student. Bradley is reported to have 'described young Ritson's abilities as too great to be wasted in such a place as Stockton',²⁾ and it may be conjectured that it was at his master's suggestion that he decided to settle in London.

During his apprenticeship the duties of the office occupied a large portion of his time but he undoubtedly found considerable leisure for non-professional reading according to his own fancy. Early visitors to Stockton report that Ritson, 'like most young men of taste and talents', was more fond of reading poetry and ancient history, than law.³⁾ Nicolas's statement that there is 'ample proof that all his leisure was devoted to antiquarian literature' is rather too comprehensive, but there can be no doubt that his main interest was antiquarian and that the bulk of his reading was in the literature of that subject.

Conditions in northern England were peculiarly fit for the making of an antiquarian. Durham and the surrounding counties were rich in British and Roman antiquities. Northumberland was

1. See unpublished letter of Ritson to Cunningham, Aug. 1772, in Appendix B.

2. 'Nicolas', p. iii

3. See Holcroft's 'Memoirs', London, 1852. pp. 92-3.

already known as the premier county of the kingdom in Roman military antiquities. Within Ritson's reach were Hadrian's great wall, the Devil's Causeway, the London road, and various camps and cairns. At Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where he had many friends, were the ancient church and university buildings, and there, in 1771, excavations brought to light the river bridge constructed by the emperor Hadrian. In the county seat of Durham, where Ritson must have gone occasionally on professional business, was the magnificent cathedral founded in 1093, by William de Carilepho, in which lay the remains of St. Cuthbert, brought thither from Lindisfarne; and of Venerable Bede, removed from Jarrow.¹⁾ All of these things, or whatever of them came to Ritson's notice, served to interest him in the ancient history of his own county and he early collected sufficient material to make him of valuable assistance to George Allan in his projected 'History of Durham', and to Richard Gough in the 1780 edition of his 'British Topography'.²⁾ His early letters from London are replete with references to the antiquities of Durham, and he never through life lost interest in them.

Among the books which Ritson read at Stockton was one which influenced the whole of his subsequent life. Mandeville's 'Fable of the Bees', which formed the basis of one of the influential schools of thought of the early eighteenth century was the

1. See 'An Account of Durham', &c, Durham, 1804.

2. Ritson's antiquarian services are more fully discussed later.

direct cause of his forswearing animal food at the age of nineteen. It was, moreover, the source of his inspiration in other ways of which he was not aware, and which his biographers have overlooked. In his 'Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food as a Moral Duty', published in 1802, he recounts the circumstances in the following words: 'The compiler himself, induced to serious reflection, by the perusal of Mandeville's 'Fable of the Bees', in the year, 1772, being the nineteenth year of his age, has ever since, to the revisal of this sheet, firmly adhered to a milk and vegetable diet, having, at least, never tasted, during the whole course of those thirty years, a morsel of flesh, fish, or fowl, or anything to his knowledge prepared in or with those substances or any extract thereof, unless on one occasion, when tempted by wet, cold and hunger, in the south of Scotland, he ventured to eat a few potatoes dressed under the roast: nothing less repugnant to his feelings to be had; or except by ignorance or imposition: unless it may be in eating eggs, which, however, deprives no animal of life, though it may prevent some from coming into the world to be murdered and devoured by others.'¹⁾

The determination at so early an age, to forswear animal food, and the adhering to that determination in the face of thirty years of good-natured ridicule by his friends and of bitter satire by his enemies, is highly characteristic of the man. After his death his Pythagorean diet was pointed to as proof of

1. 'Abstinence from Animal Food', pp.201-2

the contention that he had always been half-mad, or, at least, that the germs of insanity had been ever present. That there was a connection between the meager diet, the ill-nourished body, and the alienated mind, cannot be doubted, but as we shall have occasion later 1) to examine the nature of this connection somewhat more fully, it may be dismissed for the present. One thing, however, should be borne in mind. Far from being a mere fad, Ritson's vegetarian resolution was founded on deep and honest conviction and arose from a refined sense of humanity. There is no trait of the gentler side of his nature, the unknown facet of his character, that is more uniformly expressed throughout his correspondence than his love for the animal creation.

Ritson's first literary production of which anything is known, and the only extant work of his Stockton years, appeared in the Newcastle Miscellany in 1772 as 'Verses Addressed to the Ladies of Stockton'. 2) These youthful, amatory verses in the conventional manner are scarcely of importance save as marking the beginning of a thirty years' connection with the press. In view of a later statement that verse was 'once my trade', it will be of interest to quote a few lines from the last stanza of this poetic effort.

1. See Chapter VII.

2. Reprinted at Stockton, n.d., and again as an Appendix to Haslewood's 'Life', 1824.

'Hail, my Elvira! graceful, debonair:
 Among the fairest Thou alone art fair:
 In vain I bid the muse attempt thy praise;
 In vain the muse to sing thy charms essays;
 To sing Thy charms - alone the heavenly quires
 Should raise their Halleluias, - strike their lyres:
 The theme but worthy them: - yet gracious deign,
 To pardon my sincere, though lowly, strain.'

It should be remarked that this poem exhibits the earliest specimen of Ritson's peculiar orthography. The first personal pronoun is written with a small letter, and words formed with suffixes are invariably given their full form. 1) From a letter written to Isaac Reed, to whom he presented a copy of the 'Verses', it does not appear that he had then any intention of employing his system of orthography further. 'I beg your acceptance of the enclosed, as the only specimen of my system of speebing that ever was, or, perhaps, ever will be printed.' 2) That Ritson soon reconsidered this statement of Aug. 20, 1782, will be evident from the discussion of his later works.

On New Year's Day, 1787, Ritson wrote a long versified enistle to his friend Ralph Hoar, then a Lieutenant in the 53rd regiment at Madras, India, from which the following lines

1. Thus: versees, hobbleing, gentlyly, wonderous, riseing, - to select only a few examples.

2. Haslewood, Appendix, p. ii.

are taken:

'This many a year I have not made
Two lines of verse, though once my trade
You know it was - No, you can't tell,
But I can yet remember well.
When care was to my youth unknown,
My fancy free, my hours my own,
I lov'd i' th' laureat grove to stray,
The path was pleasant, prospect gay;
But now my genius sinks, nor knows
To make a couplet tink i' th' close.' 1)

Although the tone of this whole letter is light-hearted and the mood of these particular lines facetious, yet they afford an insight into the youthful recreations of the antiquarian and lend color to Haslewood's otherwise unsubstantiated remark that Ritson once intimated a claim to another noetical effusion that appeared in the 'Newcastle Miscellany'. There is no need, however, to lament the fact that Ritson forsook the muse for criticism and antiquarianism. Scholarship gained much thereby, and poetry lost nothing.

Towards the close of 1773 Ritson made an archaeological trip to Edinburgh. His antiquarian zeal led him to spend so much

1, 'Letters', I. 123.

money for ancient Scottish books 1) that he was unable to pay for his lodging until a fellow traveller became so interested in his discussion on the Battle of Flodden Field that he paid his reckoning for him. Intimate personal remains of Ritson are so rare that I cannot forbear quoting the concluding entries from the diary of this journey, as given by Nicolas. 'Friday, got my shoe mended: set off at eight, and after walking twelve hours, most of it in a heavy rain, arrived safe at home, after an absence of twelve days. The length of time I had been absent, the distance of my journey, and the vicissitudes of weather and pocket, the change of lodgings, and the many hardships I had experienced in my little tour, all contribute to make the time of my arrival at home the happiest moment of my life.'

Not the least important factors of these early years were the friendships formed at Stockton. Joseph Reed, 2) the controversial dramatist was a native of Stockton, and a friend and frequent correspondent of Ritson. The critic admired his abilities and late in life designed an edition of his works under the title, 'Miscellanies by Joseph Reed', but was prevented by death from completing it. He did, however, see through

1. The line of his interest is indicated by the following books which he purchased, among others, on this trip: Robert of Pitscottie's 'Chronicles of Scotland, 1436-1565' &c, Edinburgh, 1728. Thomas Ruddiman's 'Dissertation Concerning the competition for the crown of Scotland' &c, 1748: and David Hovses's 'Memoirs of the Affairs of Scotland, 1577-1603' &c, Edinburgh, 1755.

2. Joseph Reed (1727-1787) published a number of plays: 'The Register Office', 'Tom Jones', &c; and wrote papers for 'The Universal Museum', and 'The Gentleman's Magazine'.

the press, 'Dido: A Tragedy: as it was performed at the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane, with universal applause, By Joseph Reed, Author of the Register Office, Tom Jones, &c'.1) The publication of the tragedy was announced only a few days before nearly the whole impression was destroyed by fire at Nichols's printing office.2) In the Preface to this ill-starred book Ritson set forth for the first time the facts of Reed's life.3)

Ritson corresponded with John Cunningham 4) the unfortunate poet and actor, during his 'retirement' at Newcastle. The young Stockton conveyancer, dreaming, perhaps, of a literary career, was in a mysterious manner attracted to Cunningham.

1. This was in 1792, after the play had lain in MS. for a quarter of a century, and then it was not announced to the public for ten years. In 1808 the edition was completed by prefixing a short Advertisement and adding a few pages of 'Variations from the author's original MS. selected in 1792 by Mr. Ritson', who stated that 'the alterations were made by a gentleman of the first eminence in the literary world, to whom the MS. was submitted after the author's death.

2. A few copies had been previously been sent to the warehouse of Longman & Co., and these were purchased by a friend of Reed.

3. See 'Literary Anecdotes, IX. 116: 'Biographia Dramatica, 1812. II. 162.

4. John Cunningham, (1729-1773) author of an 'Elegy on a Pile of Ruins', a farce or two, and some pastoral poems, spent the latter part of his life playing minor parts with a strolling company in the north of Britain, and died in destitution at Newcastle.

His letters are marked by a spirit of humility and invariably strike a note of worshipful praise. Cunningham encouraged Ritson to think well of his own epistolary efforts and declared himself unworthy of the flattering expressions lavished upon him by the youth. Ritson resented any imputation of flattery and declared his expressions were all truthful and inspired by a sincere heart. The following extract from an unpublished letter is characteristic of the homage paid by Ritson: 'My imagination's so shallow it is most vain undertaking possible for me to pretend corresponding with you. Yet if my stupid letters have only the good fortune to procure one in return I am happier than if I were the author of Mr. Pope's literary correspondence'.¹⁾ Ritson long maintained an interest in Cunningham. He prefixed a melancholy account of his life to an edition of the Poems,²⁾ and in the 'Historical Essay on National Song' which prefaces his own edition of 'English Songs',³⁾ included this estimate of his poetic ability: 'Cunningham, though not equal to his countryman (Goldsmith) in native genius, and still less so in learned application, possesses a pleasing simplicity which cannot fail to recommend him to a reader of unadulterated taste. This simplicity may, perhaps,

1. This letter is dated 'Stockton, Friday -th Aug. 1772'. There is no address but I am convinced it was written to Cunningham for it supplements in many details the two letters of Cunningham to Ritson quoted by Nicolas, p. vii. For full text of this letter see Appendix B.

2. 'Cunningham's Poems, with an account of him in manuscript by Mr. Ritson, and extracts from Newspapers respecting him', formed Lot 808 of the sale of Ritson's library.

3. 'English Songs', I. xc-xci. See also 'Letters' I. 144: and Walker's Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards, London. 1786. p. 85 and n.

in some of his compositions, he thought too great; but when it is known that they were necessarily adapted to the intellects of a country theatre, little censure can be justly incurred by the poet'.1)

In 1771 Cunningham's company was joined by a young itinerant in the person of Thomas Holcroft, afterwards famous for his liberal views in politics and religion. While acting in the provinces Holcroft became acquainted with Ritson, and later, after both had settled in London, and a similarity of views had drawn them together, their friendship was kept fresh by frequent intercourse.2)

Cunningham was connected with still another of Ritson's early friends. It was through the instrumentality of the poet, that William Shield 3) received his first appointment as leader of the band at a theatre in Scarborough. With this beginning he grew to be director of nearly all the concerts of the north of England and soon attracted the attention of musical London. While playing at Durham and Newcastle he met Ritson. Perhaps Cunningham, Holcroft, and Shield, on one of their companionable pedestrian expeditions to the outlying towns, called upon Ritson

1. Certain of Cunningham's poems will be found in Ritson's 'English Songs', I. 230, 236, 269; II. 165; and in 'Northumberland Garland', pp. 69-71.

2. For a discussion of their later connection see Chapter VII.

3. William Shield (1748-1829), an accomplished musician and dramatic composer, published several volumes on Harmony and Theory.

in a body.1) At any rate he knew them all. With Shield he was intimate till his death. He seems to have written at least one song which Shield set to music and to have contributed others.2) The notation of the music for both his 'English' and 'Scottish Songs' was done largely by his friend.3) Nor did he hesitate to call upon Shield to supplement his lack of musical knowledge when he was endeavoring to take down ballads and songs from oral tradition.4) It was in company with Shield that Ritson made his only continental tour, a visit to France in 1791.5)

It is not known exactly when Ritson left Stockton to settle in London. His biographers usually give 1773 or 1774 as the date.6) They say he was established in London in 1775. However it is evident from a letter from Stockton, April 19, 1775,7) that he had not yet left his native town and at that time saw no prospect of getting farther than its immediate neighborhood. In an unpublished letter of John McLaren to ^SBar^{lie} Tol^{man}, dated Stockton, Nov. 5, 1775, 'Mr. Joseph Ritson, a young gentleman of this place', is commissioned with a small ^{legal} errand. Since the earliest documentary evidence I have discovered of his life in the metropolis is the letter to George Allan, Aug. 26, 1776,

1. See Holcroft's 'Memoirs', p.92.
2. Nicolas, n.6.
3. See 'Scottish Songs', Pref.vi-vii.
4. 'Letters', II. 221.
5. See Chapter VII.
6. See Nicolas, D.N.B., and Encyc. Brit.
7. See Lit. Anec.VIII. 350n.
8. MS. Douce d.1. Bodleian.

which owns Nicolas's collection, I judge that it was well towards the end of 1775 when Ritson took his leave of Stockton. He most likely walked the 250 miles to London, and his baggage was probably light, for we are told that he 'used to take his journeys on foot, with a couple of shirts in his pocket, and if he found his bundle too heavy, he would, without hesitation, throw one of his shirts away.¹⁾ With neither impediments nor connections he arrived in the city, ostensibly to seek a larger field for ~~for~~ the exercise of his legal talents, but with a strong desire to explore the treasures of the libraries and museums.

1. Selby to Percy, unpublished letter in Appendix B. For Ritson's personal testimony on his method of travel see 'Letters', I. 121.

'Some eight days after landed sound,
And traveled over Scottish ground,
Full many a weary mile, I trow,
For chiefly I on foot did go:
Tir'd, hungry - nay without a shirt
To change what was as black as dirt;
Though once to make me spruce next day,
'Twas wash'd while I in cuerno lay.'

CHAPTER II.

Business and Professional Career.

In the present chapter an attempt is made to exhibit Ritson in the conduct of business and professional duties as he appeared to the men of his own day. His biographers have discoursed at greater or less length on his literary activities, but they have said next to nothing about the other interests of his life. He was by profession a Conveyancer, not a literary antiquary; and his business was ostensibly with charters and deeds, not with ancient poetry and romances. Although he considered literary interests of first importance, his pursuit of them was made possible only by careful attention to the law. To base an estimate of the man on either phase of character alone, is unfair. A knowledge of Ritson's attitude toward ~~to~~ those closest to him, an insight into his habits of business, a familiarity with his professional ethics, an acquaintance with his legal publications, - all these are as necessary, in their place, as a knowledge of his literary labors.

Although there is no definite information concerning Ritson's movements during his first few months in London, he was evidently casting about for an opening which would give him the advantages of which he had come in search. He soon met with success, for in 1775 he was engaged as a clerk with Masterman and Lloyd, Conveyancers of Gray's Inn, and settled in chambers with a

gentleman by the name of Robinson. The salary was said to have been one hundred and fifty pounds,¹⁾ and the terms of the agreement extended over a period of five years. At the expiration of this time he determined to set up for himself as a Conveyancer or Special Pleader,²⁾ and accordingly removed to Number 8, Holburn Court, Gray's Inn,³⁾ where he occupied chambers uninterruptedly till his death. There is every reason to suppose that his service with Masterman and Lloyd was entirely satisfactory on both sides. When a member of Parliament, Masterman supplied Ritson with government franks for his correspondence, he loaned him money at different times, and during his life allowed Ritson the use of the chambers at a reduced rate. His efforts were constantly exerted for the advancement of his former apprentice, and Ritson always referred to him with expressions of gratitude and esteem.

Having severed his connection with his old masters, Ritson began his professional career without the prestige of either name or wealth. He had thoroughly mastered the details of Conveyancing, but his acquaintance in London was not extensive, and his clients were necessarily drawn from a limited circle. His salary no longer available, he was thrown entirely upon his own

1. Nicolas, p.x.

2. See Ritson's letter to George Allan, Nov. 24, 1780, in 'Lit. Anec.' VIII. 133. The reference in 'Nicolas', p. xvi, to 'Letters', I. 46, is erroneous as this letter does not appear in the 1833 edition.

3. Holburn Court is now known as South Square. Number 8 was recently rebuilt, and is at present occupied by the library and offices.

resources and at times almost despaired of being able to make his way in the metropolis. During these anxious months, when every day was a drain on his small saving and brought little in the way of income, his thoughts reverted to Stockton and he considered the advisability of returning there to practise where he was well known. He even went so far as to make enquiries of his friend Matthew Wadeson, who seems not to have encouraged his coming because the Conveyancing business was well taken care of by the long-established office of Reed. But with perseverance and conscientious application his period of probation was not long. Shortly the times began to mend and within two years he felt that his prospects in London were so good that he could ill afford to abandon what he had so hardly gained and begin anew in a different location. When Reed died, in 1782, ^{Wadeson} immediately wrote to Ritson and suggested that if he was still desirous of settling in Stockton, a favorable opportunity now offered. Ritson advised his young friend, Jack Rowntree, a former apprentice to Reed, to take the place, and wrote to Wadeson: 'I well know that your friendship and good wishes prompted you to think of me and my former enquiries. But times and circumstances are so much changed since I made them, that it is impossible for me now, to think of altering my situation, as Rowntree is every way qualified to prevent Mr. Reed's loss, as a professional man, from being felt by his clients and the public. I doubt not that the prospect, which is

certainly most flattering, will every day become more satisfactory and interesting.'¹⁾

This does not mean that Ritson had become suddenly rich, or even that he was beyond the pinch of poverty, but simply that he had reached the point where he could securely look forward to an increasing business that would eventually render him independent. Aside from pecuniary considerations there was another factor that undoubtedly weighed heavily in his decision to remain at London. By this time, he had been reading for more than five years in the British Museum and the Bodleian Library and was so deeply interested in antiquarian research that only the most unfavorable combination of circumstances could have induced him to retire into the country where he would have no opportunity of continuing this line of study.

After two years more of [^]struggle for recognition and a competence, Ritson achieved the goal of many a young English professional man - an office under the crown. Through the generous exertions of his friend Masterman, he was, on May 1, 1784, appointed High Bailiff of the Liberty of Savoy. His first concern was that the appointment should be made permanent and this hope was fulfilled on January 25, 1786, when he was granted the patent of the office for life. This place he hoped would bring him in about one hundred and fifty pounds a year, but he seems actually to have realized less than one hundred pounds from it. ²⁾ Even

1. 'Letters', I. 52.

2. 'I possess a place which brings me in from fifty to one hundred a year.' 'Letters', II.43. Feb. 26, 1794.

though the salary did not prove to be what he had expected, the position afforded a new lease of life to Ritson. Once more he was assured of a definite annual income. This removed the uncertainty as to his means of livelihood and at the same time afforded him an opportunity to devote more time to his literary studies, then grown to quite considerable proportions.

Although pleased with the appointment, Ritson did not exaggerate its importance, and replied to the felicitations of his friends that he considered it 'far too poor a subject for congratulation.'¹) However, he was seriously impressed by the responsibilities of the office. He soon discovered that to perform its duties well required a more extensive legal knowledge than he possessed, and his determination to do thoroughly everything he undertook caused him to resolve upon being called to the Bar. Accordingly he was admitted to Gray's Inn as a student, May 6, 1784, at the beginning of the Easter term.²) Having kept his terms and satisfied the requirements of the Benchers, he was called to the Bar, May 20, 1789. He must therefore have taken the usual oaths of allegiance and Supremacy. Mrs. Kirby remarks that in so doing 'he must have played the hypocrite; for . . . he most undoubtedly was an Atheist, and . . . very often declared himself

1. 'Letters', I. 88.

2. The entry in the records of Gray's Inn on this occasion is: 'Joseph Ritson, son of Joseph R. of Stockton, Durham, gent.' The only other time Ritson's name appears in the Records is where it occurs once in the formal record of a lease.

such.¹⁾ Conflicting statements have been made on this point, but they will be reserved for more ample treatment with the general question of Ritson's religious opinions.²⁾

When Ritson went up to London he left the family at Stockton in distressing circumstances. After the death of his father and mother, he generously assumed the care of his sister, Anne Frank, and her son Joseph, in the management of whose affairs he was greatly assisted by his capable friend Wadeson. Ritson had no inclination for the details of business. There were certain principles of conduct by which he was guided in such matters, but he had not the tact necessary to apply them to concrete cases. As a consequence he contented himself with knowing that his sister was supplied with all the necessaries for an economical but comfortable existence, and left the details to Wadeson. In this indirect manner his sister's affairs were undoubtedly more skillfully conducted than if Ritson had attempted to manage them himself.

The very first situation with which his new responsibilities confronted him, was one which he sought to shun. His sister had unwisely loaned her entire savings to an irresponsible individual who was unable to repay it when she was in need. Both Mrs. Frank and Wadeson appealed to Ritson for advice. His reply reveals at once his desire to avoid the matter, and his anxiety

1. See unpublished letter of H.C.Selby to Bishop Percy, June 14, 1804. Appendix B.

2. See Chapter VIII.

that a settlement should be effected without inconvenience to either party. He wrote to Wadeson: 'I am entirely ignorant of the business and do fervently recommend it to you and my sister that it should rest entirely with you, yet, I would not, for my own part do anything to distress both or either of these people, if the matter shows any likelihood of being brought to hear by favorable and indulgent treatment.'¹⁾

In the long intercourse with his nephew is revealed, as perhaps no where else, Ritson's inner nature. He undertook the entire expense of Frank's education, cared for him when he came to London to enter business, and followed his subsequent career with loving interest, being his adviser in every important step of his life. We have already seen how he sent him books and materials for his Latin school days. He was so accustomed to sending useful presents that he felt it necessary to apologize when an occasion passed without its gift. Early in January, 1782, he writes: 'I am only too poor at present, or I would have sent you a New Year's gift; but if you will grow wiser and better behaved than you were when I left you, I won't forget you on the approach of better times.'²⁾

Ritson sought constantly to give his nephew the advice which he knew from experience would be helpful to a young man in his situation. At an early age both Frank and his mother became

1. 'Letters', I. 31.

2. Ibid. I. 40.

anxious for him to 'get into business' and importuned Ritson's aid in placing him advantageously. Feeling that it would be unwise for the lad to curtail his education in order to enter professional life, Ritson wrote to his sister: 'I think Joe had better go to school another year, and we shall then determine what to make of him. He will be only fifteen, and you know I was much more before I went into business.'¹) He gave the same counsel to his nephew: 'I must beg leave to say . . . that it will be much better for you to mind your book, than to come to London. You will see it soon enough in all likelihood, though you will have little reason to lament if you never see it at all.'²) But they were insistent, and in the winter, more to relieve the anxiety of the mother than to satisfy the boy's whim, Ritson promised to take Frank to London the next summer to live with him and study for his profession. Something of Ritson's habits of life may be gleaned from his advice to his nephew to spend the last days at home in learning to cook, sew on buttons, and mend stockings. The only explanation he offered the astonished youth was this: 'You will think, perhaps, that such a lesson would be more fit for one who was coming to a Cook's shop, than a Conveyancer's chambers - but when you have been here a year or two you will probably be of a different opinion.'³)

1. 'Letters', I.90.

2. Ibid.I.91.

3. Ibid.I.104.

Meanwhile Ritson had not neglected to counsel his nephew in prudence and integrity. Besides scattering through his letters numerous suggestions for correct conduct, he published in 1785, 'The Spartan Manual, or Tablet of Morality: being a genuine Collection of the Anaphthegms, Maxims, and Precepts, of the Philosophers, Heroes, and other great and celebrated Characters of Antiquity: under proper heads. For the improvement of Youth, and the promoting of Wisdom and Virtue.' From the title, and from the general tone of the editor's comments, it would seem that this collection was prepared especially for his nephew.¹⁾ The purpose is thus explained in the Preface: 'The object of this publication being rather what has been said than what has been written, it is not pretended that the reader will find it a complete system of morality. . . . It cannot but be serviceable to the interests of virtue, more especially in younger minds, since it comprehends the genuine sentiments and expressions of a very considerable number of the most illustrious persons that ever adorned human nature, whose wisdom and justice have acquired them the veneration of ages, and will continue to do so while either is known in the world. Besides, as almost every sentence rests upon the immutable foundation of Reason and Truth, the collection possesses a degree of credit and authority to which nothing of the kind could ever before pretend.'²⁾

1. On February 24, 1785, Ritson wrote to Frank: 'I have had a 'Spartan Manual' ready for you for some time, but have met with no opportunity to send it.' 'Letters', I.101.

2. Preface, viii-ix.

This work is of slight intrinsic value and attracted little attention on ~~its~~ publication.¹⁾ While it contains much valuable information, it is presented in anything but an attractive form. The extracts are arranged in alphabetical order of subjects treated; but even this may have been with design. The Critical Review suggests that 'the form itself may be calculated for those desultory readers who will catch a sentence though they cannot pursue an essay.' However, Ritson deserves praise for his desire to guide youth in the paths of wisdom, and for his attempt to inculcate sound morality.

In the summer of 1785 Frank went into chambers with his uncle and remained there five years or more before entering upon business for himself. In a short time, like Ritson before him, he felt the need of a legal training, and asked his uncle's advice on the question of studying for the bar. Ritson answered: 'Wolley's reflection on your proposal of drawing under the bar is certainly just: 'I have experience of it myself': and can assure you that if it had not been for that little dirty place in the Savoy, I should most probably at this moment have been either in a jail, an attorney's office, or stationer's shop; and it would be hard to say which of those situations is the worst. Five years are nothing in competition with the prospect you will have of establishing yourself in a useful and lucrative business at the end of the term:

1. For reviews see Monthly Review, 72.235, and Critical Review, 59. 398-9.

whereas you might be drudging whether under or above the bar for ten times as long, without a hope of ever being worth a farthing.'

1) Frank determined to follow the advice of his friends, but did not wish to spend the full five years in terms; so he submitted to Ritson his plans for 'saving two years.' Ritson, satisfied that there was no royal road to the bar, addressed him thus: 'The ingenious expedient by which you intend to save two years is perfectly well calculated to lose five. In a word, your time would be thrown away, and yourself (most probably) put in the pillory. Nothing will do short of actual service for five complete years under articles.'²⁾

Ritson had no respect for the man who used his employer's time to further his own private ends, however laudable they might be in themselves. Just as he had no sympathy with sinecurism in any form so was he outspoken against the man who could not gain a livelihood by honest labor. There were two points upon which he placed great emphasis and which he constantly reiterated to Frank: give your employers full satisfaction; acquire a competency. In the following extract they are expressed with characteristic precision: 'After all, I would recommend it to you, as a friend, to lay your politics and philosophy upon the shelf, for a few years at least; their temporary absence will do you no harm, and their

1. 'Letters', II.22.

2. Ibid, II.25.

perpetual presence can do you no good. Your first and principal (if not sole) object should be, by a sedulous and unremitting attention to business, to do justice to your employers and acquire the means of an honest independency.'¹⁾

Ritson was very anxious that Frank should avoid the pitfalls into which he himself had unwittingly stumbled. He frequently confessed his own faults in order the better to impress his advice upon his nephew. But while he recognized the handicap under which his eccentricities placed him, he seemed utterly impotent to escape from it. There is remarkable self-revelation in this admonition: 'You must be content, for the present, to lay most of your peculiarities upon the shelf: you make a g like a n which is abominable. Avoid as much as possible all appearance of singularity or affectation, and while you are a man of business endeavor to be nothing else: I have learned the value of this piece of advice by dear-bought experience: and experience generally both costs too much and comes too late to be of service to the purchaser.'²⁾

With Frank and with other friends, especially Rowntree and Wadeson, Ritson frequently exchanged opinions on matters of professional interest. Being in London he was often asked by his provincial correspondents to look up references or to cite the law in casesⁱⁿ which they were interested. These errands he was

1. 'Letter', II.39.

2. Ibid, II.166.

always willing to do, but his liberality was imposed upon, and he was often asked to perform for nothing, services for which his friends were paid when the results of his labors were given to their clients. While Ritson seldom displayed firmness enough to refuse a favor to a friend, he occasionally remonstrated against unfair requests. Rowntree was the most frequent object of his sarcasm. At one time he wrote: 'I shall make you the usual charge for the deeds and surrender, as I take your client to be like yourself - a very honest man - who would not wish that any person should give up his time and trouble for nothing. That is not your plan, Master? No, no. You'll take care to do very well for yourself, I dare say, whatever you do for your clients.'¹)

It has already been suggested that Ritson's property was the source of considerable annoyance and rather keen disappointment during his life. Besides a couple of houses at Stockton, he had 'two or three small old houses' at Hartlepool and his uncle's property in Great Strickland. In his early years in London he sold a part of his property at Stockton. At different times Rowntree, Wadeson, and Ralph Hoar acted as his agents but none of them was successful in collecting rents. At first Ritson took the matter good-naturedly, writing to Wadeson: 'My Hartlepool estate, I fancy, is sunk into the earth, or the houses are empty,

1. 'Letters', I. 114.

or the tenants insolvent. Render up an account of thy stewardship, thou -- just steward.'¹⁾ But later the constant trouble which his property gave caused him to determine on selling everything. In this attempt he met with little success. Failing to dispose of the property for what he thought it was worth, and being involved more and more in pecuniary difficulties, he finally, in desperation commissioned his agents to sell 'for anything that can be got.' However, it was not until the last year of his life that he was finally rid of his property, and then it was swept from him in the great catastrophe which threw him more than a thousand pounds in debt.

Ritson's utter lack of business ability is shown in all his pecuniary transactions. In handling another's money, whether it were his nephew's annuity or the book fund of his friend Harrison, he was scrupulously exact in the minutest detail. But in his own buying and selling, borrowing and lending, he was woefully careless.²⁾ This placed him at the mercy of less scrupulous men, who frequently took unfair advantage of him in business transactions. At the same time it must be acknowledged that misunderstandings and differences of opinion were perhaps as often due to his own faulty memory of details. That he recognized this

1. 'Letters', I. 65.

2. An exception to this statement should be made with regard to his purchasing of books. He knew the value of an ancient volume and prided himself on his ability to drive a bargain with the booksellers. See 'Letters', I. 223, and *passim*.



possibility is evident from the fact that he always surrendered his own opinion, though seldom without a mild protest. The following extract concerns such a case: 'It ran in my head that I was to pay you forty pounds for the whole kitty: if, however, as I collect from your letter the sum was ten pounds more, I can only say that I have brewed a pretty kettle of fish, and brought my hogs to a fair market. As writing seems to be attended with some difficulty if not uneasiness, you have only to put down a figure of 4 or 5 before a cypher to satisfy me of the verity of the matter: a nod, you know, is as good as a wink to a blind horse.'¹⁾

He kept only mental notes of his financial dealings and was continually calling upon his friends for statements of accounts that he might know where he stood. In 1794 he sent this pathetic appeal to Wadeson: 'I am not poorer than I used to be, but my money, as they say, is neither here nor there. Beside, I want to put my little affairs in order that I may live, if I am to live, or at least die, in comfort.'²⁾ He frequently resolved to be systematic in his business affairs but the resolve never became more than a good intention. He wrote to Rowntree: 'I mean in future to pay more attention to the arrangement of my pecuniary matters than I have hitherto done. With half your economy I might at this moment have had a thousand pounds in the funds. My good

1. 'Letters', II.10.

2. Ibid, II.61.



sir, I have hitherto had no account to keep with you and whether I keep one or not - that is a subject upon which I dare venture to say no dispute will ever happen between you and me.'¹) Such loose methods led inevitably to difficulties and he quarreled with old friends, with publishers, and with booksellers over money matters. When he had money he loaned it to any one who asked for it and expected, in his turn, to be able to borrow as easily when in need. That his creditors failed to meet their obligations and that his friends occasionally refused to respond to his appeals were matters of surprise to no one but himself. The greater caution exercised by his friends he sometimes misconstrued as antagonism to his interests. He was almost constantly in a state of ill health and used to plead his bodily infirmities as an excuse for his business laxity. Nevertheless he was frequently involved in disagreeable altercations with his most intimate friends. The following instance is typical.

Early in 1791 Ritson asked Rowntree for the loan of one hundred pounds, and receiving no answer, construed the silence as a dislike on his friend's part to accommodate him. When Rowntree explained his failure to reply as due to other causes, Ritson apologized for the false interpretation he had given it. His apprehensions he describes as, 'false appearances which a gloomy fretfulness in my disposition magnified into clouds that

1. 'Letters', I. 156.

threatened the sun of your friendship with utter darkness, though the sky being now cleared, I find it to burn as bright as ever.'¹⁾ But this did not satisfy Rowntree, who played the role of 'injured innocence' and represented himself as deeply wounded by Ritson's lapse of faith. To this one-sided view of the matter Ritson eloquently replied: 'You will do great injustice to my feelings to suppose that all the uneasiness experienced upon this disagreeable occasion has been confined to yourself. My mind and spirits have sustained a shock of which it will not be easy for me to get the better. I am arrived at a time of life when the interruption of a much shorter acquaintance than ours is more to be dreaded than any friendship is to be courted: and the confidence that nothing of this kind would ever take place between us has rendered the disappointment inexpressibly severe. What can I say? I shall endeavor to forget everything that has passed, and to regain the favorable opinion I entertained of your friendship on the 31st of December, 1796. I am not fond of professions and have long ceased to express myself with either advantage or ease. But the intimacy of a dozen years must, I am persuaded, have convinced you of the esteem and sincerity with which I have been your truly faithful and affectionate friend.'²⁾ Again Rowntree refused to accept Ritson's statements at their face value and seemed secretly

1. 'Letters', I.183.

2. Ibid, I.200.

desirous of terminating the friendship. They continued an intermittent correspondence, but Ritson's letters are more formal and more distant, though as sincere and straight-forward as of old. Writing to Wadeson some months later he dismissed the incident, and gave a characteristically unique interpretation of Rowntree's position. 'You, my good friend, are a man of feeling: as to my part, it is no longer in the power of Elegy to make me cry, or (which I think more lamentable) of Epigram to make me laugh. I should, however, without consulting Mr. Shenstone, be very unhappy to lose the friendship of a man I esteemed; but when esteem is once destroyed, what is the value of either the friendship or the man? Rowntree, to be sure, is a very clever as well as a very useful fellow and was not, perhaps, to blame that I placed more confidence in his sincerity than it was able to bear. One should have some sort of a mental thermometer to ascertain the boiling and freezing points of a man's friendship. At least (to change my metaphor) it would be very important to know 'the sticking place' of the machine, lest by screwing too high you break it in pieces, or render it of no further use. My friend Rowntree's zeal might be up to the loan of fifty, or perhaps, sixty, or even seventy pounds, but the mention of a hundred extinguished his fires and converted his hot water into cold ice. I am therefore content to let him freeze!¹)

1. 'Letters', I.211.

The last year of Ritson's life was marked by the greatest calamity of all those that befell him in a pecuniary way. In this manner does he describe the beginning of the end: 'Having a great opinion of an acquaintance who did business on the Stock Exchange, I was induced in hope and flattery to speculate with all the money I had or was able to get'.¹⁾ As a consequence of the mismanagement of his friend, combined with the sudden peace which terminated the French-English difficulties, he was utterly ruined, his loss being 'considerably above one thousand pounds.'²⁾ He was forced to sell his uncle's land in Strickland and dispose of a part of his library to satisfy his creditors. However, his long sickness and the constant recurrence of pecuniary distress rendered him comparatively insensible to this last blow so far as it affected himself, although he was keenly alive to the hardship it entailed on his dependent relatives. Like the moth that returned again and again to the flame that burned it, Ritson determined on a third speculation. Within three months after his great loss he was waiting, he says, with a small amount of money in the bank, 'till

1. 'Letters', II.234.

2. Despite 'his avowed detestation of every species of gambling' (Nicolas, p.lxi) this was not the first time Ritson had speculated on the Stock Exchange. On June 19, 1793, he wrote to Harrison: 'As you allowed me to suit my convenience with regard to the payment of your draught, I shall take the liberty to defer it till I leave town, having turned stock-jobber and disabled myself by buying into the funds. I shall be loser of ten pounds by this business; so that you must never say I bargain like a tradesman.'

'Letters', II.18

the price of consuls fall to nothing in consequence of the expected French invasion, when I shall invest all I have.'¹⁾

The recklessness and indifference of his last days are further reflected in his experience on attempting to insure his life; which is best told in his own words: 'I was about to insure ^{my life} in the equitable assurance office for one thousand pounds as Jack Reed had done a year or two before his death, and expected from a principal clerk that every thing would be ready at a certain time when the chief director, asking me if I ever had a complaint? owning in reply, that I had received a paralytical shock the preceding year: when I called at the appointed time, I learned that the directors declined the business, so, without a single word, I turned my back and came away as cool as a cucumber.'²⁾

Although a resident of London for the greater part of his life, Ritson retained his citizenship at Stockton and maintained a keen interest in affairs there. His vacations were spent away from London, usually taking the form of archaeological tours, but he endeavored to visit his native town each summer. His relations with the people there were not altogether friendly. He quarreled with Christopher, the publisher of two of his 'Garlands', and early in 1784, authorized Rowntree to act for him in bringing suit against Thurkill, the Postmaster, for certain alleged unfair charges in connection with his office. This affair Ritson prose-

1. 'Letters', II.246. This investment was never made. It required five hundred pounds in addition to his books to liquidate Ritson's total indebtedness.

2. Ibid, II.244.

cuted with vigor but could not refrain from satirical thrusts at his attorney the while. 'I only entreat you', he says, 'to pay the same attention to the conduct of the cause as if your client were in Jamaica, and we may do very well.'¹⁾ The case was abandoned in July by Thirkill's declining to stand suit and agreeing to pay all the costs. But this did not satisfy Ritson, and he determined to begin a fresh act against him as soon as the details of this case were adjusted. Rowntree advised against further action in the premises, suggesting that his client had sufficiently shown his animosity. To this Ritson characteristically replied: 'I beg leave to differ from you in the opinion that I have carried resentment far enough' - I seldom relinquish it while I remember the offense, and would not have you be surprised if I carry it to my grave.'²⁾ He seems, however, to have abandoned the project, for on April 18, 1786, he asks Rowntree for the return of two or three letters, 'which were intended to have been made use of against that knavish postmaster.'³⁾

In July, 1790, after much deliberation, Ritson decided to stand for the Circuit at Durham, and went into the north for that purpose. He failed of election but was not greatly disappointed over the loss of the post. He was at this time so deeply engrossed in his literary and critical studies that he expressed

1. 'Letters', I. 87.
2. Ibid, I. 98.
3. Ibid, I. 109.

the wish that he might abandon altogether the conveyancing profession. This however was impossible as his only assured income was from his office in the Savoy.

In the same year with his call to the bar Ritson brought out the first 1) of his publications on subjects connected with his profession. This was 'A Digest of the Proceedings of the Court Leet of the Manor and Liberty of Savoy, parcel of the Duchy of Lancaster, in the county of Middlesex: from the year 1682 to the present time.' 2) This volume is the natural product of his study in preparation for the duties of Bailiff of the Savoy, though few persons would have thought it necessary to go so minutely and thoroughly into the antiquities of the office. His interest in the Court Leet is otherwise symptomatic. The most ancient court in the land, originating in the early feudal days and for ages the most authoritative court of record in existence, it had sunk, by the end of the eighteenth century, to the place of least authority and was ultimately entirely superseded by the modern courts of the justices. Only an antiquarian would find pleasure

1. In the list of Ritson's works in Allibone's 'Critical Dictionary of English Literature, etc', Phila. and London, 1908, is included, 'Office of a Lord High Steward of England, 1776, 8vo', which I have not seen mentioned elsewhere.

2. London, 1789; reprinted in 'Law Tracts', 1794.

in delving into the ancient records of an institution whose glory was already faded and whose usefulness was practically negligible.

'The Office of Constable: being an entirely New Compendium of the law concerning that ancient minister for the conservation of the peace, carefully compiled from the best authorities: with a preface and an introduction, containing some account of the origin and antiquity of the office',¹⁾ was prompted by 'a sincere wish to benefit the community, by furnishing its most ancient, most constitutional, and most useful officer with a commendious system or manual of his duty and powers, carefully extracted from, and upon an actual perusal of the best authorities!'²⁾ The work as published is a 'mere epitome of the original compilation (for) the utility of the measure seemed to be more favored by a pamphlet affording the fullest information in the narrowest compass.'³⁾

In the Preface Ritson protests against the continuous making of new laws. There are many laws on the statute books which are not, and many more which ought not, to be in force because they grant special privileges. In fact 'every little dirty parish in the environs of London must have a law for itself.

1. London, 1791; reprinted in 'Law Tracts', 1794, and again separately, 2nd edition enlarged, 1815. Lot 976 of the sale of Ritson's library consisted of, 'The office of Constable with the MS. intended for another edition.'

2. 'Office of Constable', Preface, iii.

3. Ibid, iv.

The churchwardens can provide the money, the attorney wants a job, the justice looks forward to the penalties, and the 'gemmen of the westry' like authority: an act of parliament is accordingly obtained and being an admirable compound of ignorance and knavery, cannot fail of proving exceedingly beneficial to the community.'¹⁾ He also objects to the custom of writing laws in a style that is difficult or impossible for the layman to understand, a difficulty which he hopes, in the present compilation to obviate so far as the constable is concerned. He proposes reforms in the manner of electing constables and in the duties required of them but has no hope that such constructive and progressive suggestions will be adopted. 'If, indeed, the proposal were for a productive tax upon constables, or for the purpose of making bad worse, or of heaping oppression upon the oppressed, there would be little fear of its being adopted. This therefore, is another of those self-reforming grievances which must be patiently suffered to attain their worst state.'²⁾

The Introduction is historical in its nature, tracing the etymology of the word constable, and the history of the office from the earliest times. In the main body of the work are given the powers and duties of the constable, with law citations in each case, - all traced to original sources. Ritson's personal contribution is in the nature of a few notes. On the whole it may

1. 'Office of the Constable', Preface, vi. n.

2. Ibid, xiv.

he judged a useful, certainly a very learned and accurate compilation. Such, in general, is the plan pursued in each of the law tracts. Although the method of treatment is quite similar, the subjects are sufficiently differentiated, as the descriptive titles of the separate volumes indicate.

The third professional work, and the second to appear in 1791, was, 'The Jurisdiction of the Court Leet: Exemplified in the Articles which the Jury or Inquest for the King, In that Court, is charged and sworn, and by Law enjoined to Inquire of and Present. Together with Approved Precedents.'¹⁾ Although this was his second publication dealing with the Court Leet it did not by any means exhaust the material he had gathered on that subject. The method of handling the material is explained in the 'Advertisement'. 'It was originally intended that the compiler's publication on the subject here treated of should have comprised all that, to his knowledge, had been said, or, in his judgment, could be said, upon it. Large collections were made for the purpose, and the work partly proceeded in; but the bulk of the volume and the scanty sale it was likely to experience effectually discouraged him from proceeding with that plan, and produced the Introduction and Analysis now presented to the public.'

1. London, 1791, reprinted in 'Law Tracts', 1794, separately, 2nd edition 'with great additions', 1809; 3rd edition, 1816. Lot 978 of Ritson's library consisted of 'The Jurisdiction of the Court Leet....with the MS. for another edition.'

In 1794 the three foregoing tracts 1) were published in a single volume with the title: 'Law Tracts, by Joseph Ritson, of Gray's Inn, Barrister'. 2) In these compilations is exhibited an accuracy in the illustration of legal antiquities which places Ritson foremost among the antiquarian writers of his profession. In addition to the three treatises already considered, he prepared ten other legal publications. As the demand for works of this nature was almost negligible, he did not put a single one of these manuscripts to the press. Only two of them have appeared posthumously, and the remainder can no longer be traced. 3)

Although himself a Barrister, Ritson had a great contempt for attorneys and for their profession. He never lost an opportunity to swinge them, and his remarks range all the way from humorous thrusts at the practise of buying up 'credible witnesses', to serious charges of dishonesty. With satiric facetiousness he thus congratulates Rowntree on his progress in the profession: 'I hear with pleasure the increase of your business. To establish yourself at Stockton you have nothing to do but, by dint of evidence, etc, to gain a desperate cause or two, ruin

1. 'Digest of Proceedings of Court Leet', 'Office of Constable', and 'Jurisdiction of Court Leet'.

2. The copy in the British Museum contains two MS. pages, in Ritson's hand, descriptive of '10th and 11th W.3.C. 23', and its application to a particular case.

3. The lost MSS. are numbers 1 to 8 of Appendix D. II. The two posthumous publications are: 1. 'The Office of Bailiff of a Liberty', London, 1811; 2. 'Critical Observations on the various and essential parts of a Deed', appended to 'Practical Points, or Maxims in Conveyancing, &c. By a late eminent Conveyancer (Ralph Bradley)', London, 1804; 3rd edition, 1826.

two or three honest, and hang two or three innocent men, and your fortune is made.'¹⁾ In the curiously inconsistent letter in which he recommends his nephew to study for the bar, he says he has found the attorneys to be, 'not only the most ignorant and capricious, but the most insincere, unprincipled, and in every respect, worthless of men.' And in the next sentence but one, he advises Frank to join the ranks of those he has just condemned: 'If you do not immediately accept Wolley's offer (to draw under the bar) you may resign yourself to everlasting damnation, as there will not be a chance left for your doing well.'²⁾

Ritson felt that attorneys were not only dishonest, but that they were useless, and parasites upon society. He would destroy their profession by having falsely accused men defend themselves, while the guilty, who deserve punishment, should not be defended. Apropos of the trial of Horne Tooke, he writes to his nephew: 'But I say again it is infinitely more commendable for a man of talents, accused of virtuous acts or intentions, by the name of treason or sedition, to depend entirely upon his own powers than to be beholden to the eloquence of prostituted hirelings, let their abilities be what they may, procured too by means of a beggarly subscription: though no one has had energy enough to do so

1. 'Letters', I.72. Elsewhere he refers to Hutchinson, author of 'The History and Antiquities of Durham', etc., as 'an attorney who has but one object and that is the lucre of gain.' Ibid, I.205.

2. Ibid, II.22.

in this country. If Horne Tooke had defended himself, without assistance, he might, indeed, have been hanged, but I believe, as he told the court, he would have been the last that suffered under such laws.¹⁾

In his own conduct Ritson exemplified his beliefs. He never allowed himself to be referred to as an attorney, and considered the epithet odious. In August, 1790, he wrote to Rowntree: 'You need not have been under the least apprehension of my addressing you by so odious a title as attorney-at-law, where you are only following your amusement. . . . You are just beginning to value a childish distinction which I have learned to be ashamed^{of}.²⁾

As a Conveyancer and Consulting Barrister, Ritson limited his ^{practise} to Chambers. Only once, and that five years after his admittance to the bar, is he known to have appeared in court wearing his professional costume. It was on the occasion of Horne Tooke's trial, when speculators were selling seats in the court room at a guinea each, that Ritson donned his wig and gown to secure free entrance.³⁾ As a rule he was seclusive and uncommunicative. Just as he avoided his playmates at school, so as a man he had few intimates. He confessed to little acquaintance with the law firms of London.⁴⁾ The Benchers of his Inn

1. 'Letters', II.84.
2. Ibid, I.173.
3. Ibid, II.57.
4. Ibid, I.159.



he considered 'a parcel of fools', and he scarcely knew the men who lived nearest him. Robert Smith says: 'Mr. Ritson lived in the same staircase with me in Gray's Inn for many years, and the common civilities of the day passed between us, but nothing more - we never visited.'¹⁾ A greater intimacy with his fellows would undoubtedly have tempered the severity of Ritson's judgment of attorneys as a class.

Ritson's professional code of ethics was as uncompromising as his literary. He not only believed that the guilty man should have no hired defense at the criminal bar, but he felt that no honest man would go to court with an unjust cause. He remarked on one occasion: 'I do not think that man honest who would avail himself of a quirk of law to obtain what in reason and justice he can possibly have no right to.'²⁾ Thus far many men of his own profession would agree with him, at least in theory. But Ritson did not stop here; he had the courage of his convictions. In all his professional dealings he was guided by one principle - that of Honesty. His opinion once formed, nothing could influence him to act contrary to his conviction. He was always willing to hear arguments in favor of a different line of conduct, but these he invariably referred back to his touchstone of honesty, where, if they failed in the test, they were rejected.

1. See Smith's narrative. Appendix B.
2. 'Letters', I. 70.

The absurd lengths to which he went in pursuance of his policy are illustrated in the following anecdotes related by Surtees. 'He chose to exercise his judgment and his sturdy morality on questions which a less scrupulous lawyer would have left to his client to settle with his own conscience. For instance, having made up his mind that the Duke of Athol had already been sufficiently remunerated for ceding his rights in the Isle of Man, he refused all the solicitations of his friend, Frances Russel, Esq., Solicitor to the Board of Control, to induce him to draw the draft of a petition to Parliament, for the further recompense which the Duke afterwards received. The argument, 'if you do not, another will', had no effect on Ritson, nor would he ever set cheerily to work, without ^{being} perfectly satisfied of the strict propriety of the business in which he was engaged. As a somewhat ludicrous instance, he steadily refused to draw the draft of Jonas Hanway's Bill for the Incorporation of the Chimney-sweepers.'¹⁾

But Ritson's influence was not wholly negative in this regard. At least one instance is reported of his having successfully exerted himself to drive out of office a man who openly defied the law. As High Bailiff of the Savoy Ritson was associated with Reeves, the notorious leader of the association for encouragement of spies and reformers, and for the suppression of freedom of writing and speaking upon political topics. Although

1. Robert Surtees, 'The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham, &c.' 4 vols. London, 1816-40. III. 193, note 1.

Reeves was High Steward of the Savoy, Ritson lost no opportunity to discredit him because of his political conduct. Before Ritson's death Reeves resigned his position. It was Ritson's belief that he, by his continued hostility, had driven his superior from office.¹⁾

But the law was never Ritson's first object. Had he devoted himself to it, his talents, his inflexible integrity, and his high professional character must have led to wealth and renown. He was content, however, to use the law as a means to other ends. He practised solely as a Conveyancer, and drew his business from such clients as came to him unsolicited. A small circle of friends furnished sufficient work to enable him to eke out a moderate private income, and to devote the bulk of his time to studies more congenial to his taste.

Sir Walter Scott is reported to have said of Ritson: 'he had an honesty of principle about him, which, if it went to ridiculous extremes, was still respectable from the soundness of the foundation. I don't believe the world could have made Ritson say the thing he did not think.'²⁾ The fundamental identity of Ritson the professional man with Ritson the critic of letters is apparent when it is recognized that Scott's statement, made with the literary antiquarian in mind, applies with equal force to the Barrister-at-law.

1. See Memoir of Ritson, Monthly Magazine, Nov. 1803.

2. Quoted by Chambers: 'The Book of Days', London, 1869, vol. II, p. 406.

CHAPTER III.

Literary Beginnings; The Warton Controversy, 1775-1782.

As a youth in Stockton Ritson made the acquaintance of the noted antiquary, George Allan,¹⁾ and became deeply interested in his researches into the antiquities of Durham and Northumberland. As a result of this friendship Ritson's attention was directed to the ancient remains of his native shire and city, and when he went up to London in search of wider opportunities for the display of his legal talents, he carried with him a desire to assist in the work of his friend, and perhaps to compile a publication of his own. Shortly after his arrival in town he was introduced to the British Museum by Allan,²⁾ and was soon recognized as an habitual visitor there. In the hours that could be spared from his duties as clerk in the office of Masterman and Lloyd he was usually to be found in the Museum poring over ancient documents and literary manuscripts. The habits of life begun at this time - he seemed to have limited his recreation to the daily walk to and from the Museum - were adhered to during the remainder of his life.

1. George Allan (1736-1800), celebrated antiquary and topographer, possessed a rare collection of manuscripts relating to Durham and Northumberland, and published a number of works of antiquarian interest:

2. See 'Lit. Anec.' VIII. 350.

Ritson's first investigations were along the line of interest suggested by Allan, and he soon began to repay his friend for the kindly assistance he had rendered. The earliest of Ritson's collected letters is addressed to Allan, Aug. 26, 1776, and concerns material which he had collected to aid his friend in a projected 'History of Durham.'¹⁾ The correspondence thus begun was continued until Allan's death, and the antiquarian interest engendered at this time never died out of Ritson's mind. He continued to collect materials and to extend his acquaintance with ancient manuscripts; but a concern for literary antiquities soon became predominant and his topographical and historical collections received correspondingly less attention.

An impelling curiosity to enlarge his acquaintance with literary antiquities led Ritson to visit the Bodleian and other libraries at Oxford as soon as an opportunity presented, which was not until the latter end of his vacation in 1779.²⁾ This

1. Nicolas is obviously in error when he states (p. xi) that this letter exhibits Ritson as aiding Mr. Allan in collecting materials for a history of Sherburn Hospital, in Durham.' That work Ritson ^{undoubtedly} knew but it was published in 1771. His material was to be used in the 'History of Durham' instead. Allan's project was, however, later abandoned when Hutchinson, at his suggestion, took up the work, and under his guidance, completed it. Allan remarks modestly that he 'furnished a variety of manuscripts and printed collections unarranged and undigested.' 'Lit. Anec.' VI. 125. Hutchinson's 'History and Antiquities of the county palatine of Durham' appeared in 3 volumes at Newcastle, 1785-94.

2. 'Letters', I. 6.

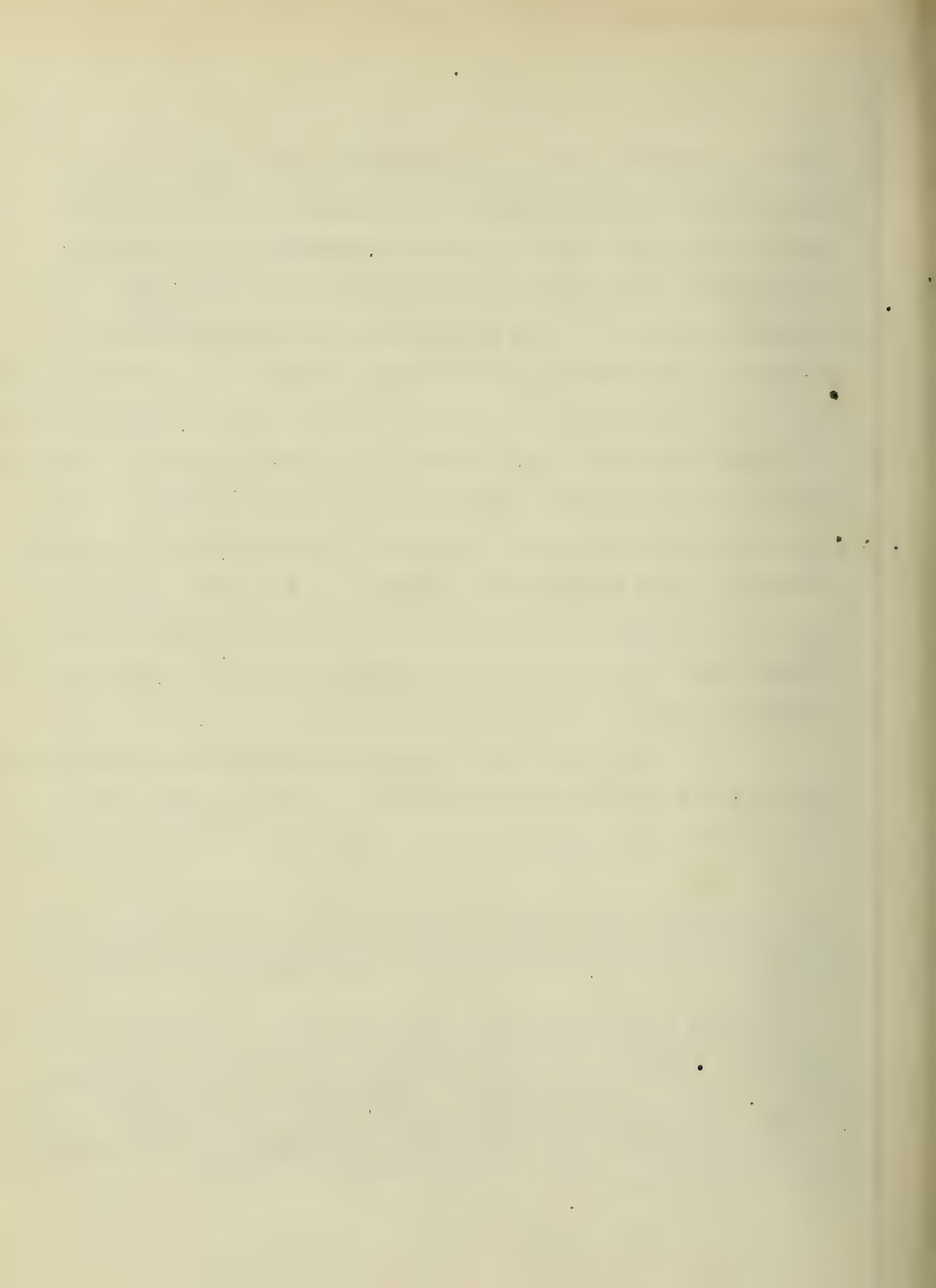
journey, like nearly all his excursions, seems to have been a pedestrian one, and his diary is declared to be 'no otherwise curious than as presenting the first evidence of his sceptical opinions.'¹⁾ His success at the Bodleian, he says, 'though not altogether equal to my expectations was pretty reasonable.'²⁾ Among the notes which he took at the library are an account of the Bodleian transcript of the Bolden Book, and the original register of Richard de Kelaue. The former is the earliest extant evidence of his gathering material used in his philippic against Warton. From the latter manuscript he noted in particular two indentures in French, dated at Stockton, relating to the appointment of governors in the Bishopric of Durham, an account of which he sent to Richard Gough who inserted it in the new edition of his 'British Topography'.³⁾

By this time Ritson's researches had carried him so far that he had formed a definite design of printing a 'Villare of the County with useful appendixes'. On February 13, 1790, he acquainted

1. Nicolas xv. The diaries both of this trip and of his 1773 expedition to Edinburgh (see ante p.) were evidently in the possession of Joseph Frank but I have been unable to get any trace of them.

2. 'Letters', I. 6.

3. Richard Gough (1735-1809) first published 'Anecdotes of British Topography' in a single volume, 1768. It was a valuable work giving information as to what light had from time to time been thrown on the subject of British topographical antiquities, and enumerating most of the materials which had been collected whether in print or manuscript. An improved edition was first published in two volumes, in 1780, and afterwards augmented by the addition of a third volume.



Allan with his project, venturing the hope that 't would obtain his approbation and assistance.¹⁾ But although he continued to amass material for this and similar collections, no one of them was ever published.²⁾ He soon came to have, in his own words, 'so many irons in the fire and other fish to fry' that something must, of necessity, be neglected.

Now that he was familiar, through five years intercourse, with the British Museum, and had been made acquainted with the Bodleian, Ritson's next object was Cambridge. Through the generous offices of friends he had been enabled to borrow books and manuscripts from the University libraries for several years before he had an opportunity to visit them.³⁾ On July 20, 1780, he set off for Cambridge, intending to spend a few weeks in this depository of ancient learning and then go further into the country for the remainder of the vacation. This plan was not fully carried out for 'momentous' business recalled him to London early in August. It was not, however, until after he had accomplished at least a part of his ^{original} purpose, and had met with a singular stroke of good fortune, in making the acquaintance of Richard Farmer, of whose friendship he was always proud to speak. He sums up the results of

1. 'Letters', I. 9.

2. Besides numerous manuscript corrections and additions to Gough's 'British Topography', Ritson left the following manuscripts in practical readiness for the press: 'Villare Dunelmense, the names of all the towns, villages, hamlets, castles, sea-houses, halls, granges, and other houses and buildings, having any appellation within the Bishopricks or county palatine of Durham!'; 'Topographical Rines'; and 'Description of the north-east part of Cleveland.'

3. See Surtees, 'History and Antiquities of Durham', III. 193.

his visit thus: 'I saw a great many curious books, made a great many important discoveries: and what is better than all, became intimately acquainted with Dr. Farmer, whom I found a most sensible, liberal, benevolent and worthy man.'¹⁾

Not only Ritson's literary interests but his personal beliefs as well, were founded before he left Stockton. In London he continued to disregard religion and soon came to scoff at orthodox faiths, and afterwards to condemn them and their professors. Likewise he carried his vegetarian theory into practise in London as fearlessly as he had done in Stockton. Far from attempting to hide his peculiarity, he rather paraded it before the notice of his associates and sought always to make converts to his doctrine. In his letters to relatives and familiar friends he constantly preached the morality and the humanity of abstinence from animal food. His youthful nephew, listening to his voice as that of an oracle, followed his instructions implicitly: and his sister came near sacrificing her life to his whim: while his friends ridiculed his outbursts or silently ignored them.

From the very first Ritson manifested only a passing interest in politics and governmental affairs. Periods of upheaval and popular excitement stimulated him to comment but not to action. His political leanings are revealed in his remarks concerning the conduct of the 'War Ministry' in 1780, and its resignation two

1. 'Letters', I.57.

years later. Of the popular disturbance in London, in June, 1790, he was an interested spectator, though in no way a participant. These riotous outbreaks he considered a not unnatural culmination of the long-growing discontent with the ministry. Under the leadership of Lord North, the Government was charged with gross extravagance and with unfair favoritism to the Catholics. The opposition, headed by Burke, Fox, and Dunning, had made repeated demands for reform but without marked success. At last the lower classes of London, who thought themselves much outraged by the Catholic indulgences, determined to take matters into their own hands and seek redress. Accordingly, the Protestant Society was formed in 1780, and Lord George Gordon, a shallow-minded but enthusiastic reformer, became its president. On Friday, June 2, about fifty thousand members of the Society marched to Parliament and presented a petition of grievances, which was promptly voted down by an overwhelming majority of that indignant body. This disappointment was the signal for a lawless demonstration which lasted till the following Thursday. The frenzied mob destroyed the houses and private chapels of many foreign ministers; burned the prisons and toll-gates, and pillaged the homes of Sir John Fielding and Lord Mansfield, destroying the libraries, art collections, and plate. The disturbance was finally quelled by the militia with the loss of upwards of a hundred lives. On Wednesday night when the confusion was greatest, when as many as thirty fires were to be seen

blazing in different quarters of the city,1) Ritson wrote to his mother, then in her last illness, describing these scenes as he had witnessed them, and expressing his ardent sympathy with the Society in its opposition to the 'scoundrel Ministry'. His entertaining narrative concludes with a dark outlook upon the future and a strong condemnation of the Government. 'In short', he writes, 'confusion, horror, bloodshed and devastation seem just upon the start of a universal reign. In the meantime, no person any way innocent has, or(except by consequence) will suffer, and most of those whom they single out as examples of their vengeance, have been long and deservedly objects of public detestation. Such as Lord Mansfield, lord North, lord Sandwich, lord George Germaine, and others of the present scoundrel ministry.'2)

In 1782 Ritson again manifested unusual concern in political affairs. On March 20, the much maligned war ministry resigned. Ritson referred to the event as 'the dismissal of those miscreant blockheads who formed the late infamous administration, some of whom it is to be hoped will yet hon headless.'3) The new administration with the Marquis of Rockingham first lord of the treasury, and Fox and lord Shelburne, secretaries of state, had as its avowed plan, peace with America and substantial reforms in several branches of the civil list expenditure. The appoint-

1. Robert Bisset, 'The History of the Reign of George III.' 2nd edition, 8 vols. London, 1820. Vol. III. pp. 21-33.

2. 'Letters', I. 16.

3. Ibid, I. 44.

ments pleased Ritson immensely. He spoke of the Ministers as 'all men of approved abilities and integrity - the ablest heads and soundest hearts.' Their program was equally commended: 'Peace! Peace! will be the undoubted blessing of the new government We may now begin to hope for the representation of a new comedy called, 'The Blessings of the Constitution Restored.'

Although Ritson's career as an editor did not properly begin until 1782, yet he published at least two minor works before that time. The first appeared in 1778, and was a privately printed broadside composed of three tables designed to show 'The Descent of the Crown of England' in the Stuart line: Table I contains 'The true hereditary succession from Egbert the Great, King of Wessex, to the first Saxon monarch of England, to James VI of Scotland.' Table II shows 'The true hereditary succession from William the Conqueror, supposing a title in him by conquest', in which are included Robert Duke of Normandy, the eldest son of the Conqueror, the Empress Maud, Arthur Duke of Brittainy, and his sister Eleanor, Edward Mortimer Earl of march, Richard Duke of York, father of Edward the fourth, Elizabeth of York; and he omits William the second, Stephen, Henry the second, John, Henry the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh, and ends with the young Pretender, whom he styles Charles the third. The third table is entitled 'the de-facto succession from Edward Ironside', which is only remarkable for the notes appended to some of the names, and for its including Lady Jane Grey. The word 'usurper' is applied with great freedom

and sometimes with truth; but it escaped Ritson's critical acumen that his favorite, James the first of England, 'than whom', he says, 'no sovereign could perhaps ever boast so many and such excellent titles to his dominions', was de jure as much an usurper as either of those on whom he bestows the designation, until the previous legislative enactments relative to the succession were repealed, and his right recognized and established by act of Parliament - a period of nine months.'1)

The principal importance of this work is its showing Ritson a firm adherent of the Jacobite principles, then rapidly on the wane. His own political sentiments are most strongly set forth in the Preface to the first edition which he declared he 'never dared to publish.'2) This extremely curious work, limited in its first impression to fifty copies, was reprinted in 1783 but is now very rare, not one copy, so far as I have been able to discover, being extant in a public library.3)

According to Haslewood, Ritson edited the second edition of the 'Odes of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams'4) in 1780. Although this statement is given on the authority of 'his own avowal to an intimate acquaintance', Haslewood adds that 'his labor could not extend beyond collating the proof-sheets.'5) Nicolas declares

1. Nicolas, xiii. I cannot locate a single copy of this tract.

2. Haslewood, p. 8.

3. According to Martin, 'Bibliographical Catalogue of Privately printed Books', 2nd ed., London, 1854, only fifty copies of the second edition were printed.

4. Sir Charles Hanbury Williams (1708-1759), courtier, diplomatist and satirist, died by his own hand after humiliations by his government had thrown him into insanity. A fairly complete edition of his works, consisting mostly of political satires, coarse ballads and squibs, was published in three volumes, in 1822.

5. Haslewood, p. 5.

this statement is denied by his nephew and executor, and is rendered extremely unlikely by the disgust which Ritson always expressed at licentious poetry.¹⁾ In the complete ^{absence} ~~evidence~~ of internal evidence - this volume has no preface, notes, or editorial matter of any kind - the case seems to resolve itself into a question of the word of Haslewood and the 'intimate acquaintance' against that of Nicolas and the 'nephew and executor'. None of the lists of Ritson's works appearing in contemporary Reviews includes the 'Odes', but Thomas Seccombe, writing the life of Williams in the Dictionary of National Biography, credits Ritson with the first edition in 1775, as well as with the later edition.²⁾

Nicolas's personal reason for denying this work to Ritson is his aversion to licentious poetry. But this statement should not be given too great weight, for in his avowed works Ritson is not wholly free from the charge of handling unchaste material. It is true that he boasted of excluding from 'English Songs', published in 1783, every verse that might bring a blush to the cheek of innocence; but this was at least three years after he is said to have worked with Williams, and the reading and thinking man, especially if he is young, often finds his estimates of moral values and his judgments on ethical questions suffering

1. Nicolas, xvi. n.

2. 'The Odes of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, Knight of the Bath', edited by Joseph Ritson in 1775 (London, 1780, 1784.), is little more than a reprint of the 'Collection' of 1763. This is the only evidence I have discovered indicating Ritson's connection with the 'Odes' prior to 1780. Granting for the nonce that Ritson brought out the second edition, it seems to me highly improbable that he should have had anything to do with the work as early as 1775, the year of his settlement in London.

radical changes in even shorter periods. Besides, it may be mentioned that as late as 1782 Ritson includes in his publications material that is surely indecent and that differs only in degree from the worst passages in the 'Odes'.¹⁾

On the other hand, the 'licentiousness' and 'scurrility' of these 'Odes' have been considerably overemphasized. Critics are apt to forget that the moral standards of a nation change with the passing of time, and so forgetting or ignoring, to charge solely to an individual what are the vices of the age in which he lived. Not only Williams, but Chesterfield, Swift, Pope, Addison - in fact almost every writer from Milton to Dr. Johnson - may be charged with immudicity. Although Carlyle referred to Williams as 'deep in that ston-nail or scandal-department of an extinct generation'²⁾, and the Quarterly Review declared his 'Collected Works' to contain specimens of obscenity and blasphemy more horrible than we have before seen collected into one publication,³⁾ such denunciations are absurdly beside the mark when applied to the little volume of 'Odes', of which not above three of the thirty-eight pieces it contains are in any way objectionable. That

1. See the 'Observations on Warton', *passim*.

2. 'History of Frederick the Great.' Centenary edition, London, 1898, vol. V, p. 246.

3. 'The Works of the Right Honorable Sir Charles Hanbury Williams K.B., from the originals in the possession of his grandson, the Right Honorable the Earl of Essex, with notes by Horace Walpole, Earl of Oxford.' Edited by Edward Jeffery. 3 vols. London, 1822. Quarterly Review, October, 1822. 28.47.

Williams could, on occasion, be as filthy as Swift and as indecent as Wycherly, is not denied; but in this particular publication he exhibits rather the gaiety of Congreve's lighter verses than the coarseness of his contemporaries. So far, then, as its contents are concerned, there is no justification for denying that Ritson edited this little volume of 'Odes'. But there is no necessity for leaving the question in this inconclusive state, as all previous writers have left it. Had the biographers of Ritson examined his acknowledged publications they would have discovered that he manifests an ignorance of Williams quite unexpected in an editor, and especially in one who insisted upon a thorough knowledge of every subject which he handled.

In the Advertisement to the first volume of 'English Anthology', 1793, Ritson made an earnest appeal for the dates of the birth and death of a number of poets, - among them Sir Charles Hanbury Williams - 'in order that the selections from those poets may be duly arranged.' The second volume, 1794, contained two of Williams' odes: 'On the death of Matzel', and 'On Miss Harriet Hanbury'; both of which are included in the 1780 volume of 'Odes'. The dates of Williams had not yet been determined, a footnote reading: 'Born 1.... : dyed 17 . . .' Of course it is by no means improbable that one might edit a poet's works without knowing the exact dates of his birth and death, but it is scarcely probable that the editor of a poem in 1780, should by 1793, be doubtful of

its author. And yet the ode beginning 'Come Chloe, and give me sweet kisses'¹⁾ is printed in 'English Songs', 1783,²⁾ as 'By Sir Charles Hanbury Williams?' These examples of unfamiliarity with the 'Odes' are to my mind, conclusive evidence that Ritson did not edit that volume.

Ritson's second acknowledged production of this period was a piece of satiric humor published in December, 1781, at Newcastle, as 'By permission of the Mayor. Vivat Rex. The Stockton Jubilee, or Shakesneare in all his glory. A choice Pageant for Christmas Holidays. Veluti in Speculum.' This 'unwarrantable satire' consisted ~~in~~ ^{of} extracts from Shakesneare applied to all the principal inhabitants of Stockton. Frank says: 'the characters, were generally, adapted with the most admirable precision.'³⁾ At any rate the pamphlet seems to have aroused a storm of ill feeling in Stockton. Ritson attempted to conceal from most of his friends that he was its author, although to Ralph Hoar he is said to have entrusted the delivery of various copies to the Newcastle Post Office.⁴⁾ But he wrote to Wadeson an implicit acknowledgment of his connection with the work. He speaks of having heard 'that a most impudent and malicious rascal has been libelling the accomplished inhabitants of Stockton in a twelfpenny pamphlet',

1. 'Odes', p. 20.
2. I. 238.
3. 'Letters', I. 38 n.
4. Nicolas xvii.

refers to the treatment accorded Wadeson in it, and then asks if it is true that the scoundrel has been apprehended 'and is to be publicly baited at the bull-ring?' But it is useless for him to attempt concealment in this fashion for it is apparent that he is already suspected by many of his victims. In a post script to this letter, he says, anopos of a possible visit to his friend : 'But, alas! I understand that my reappearance in Stockton Streets would cost me my life! Gods mercies! My good friend, you see what 'an' infernal world we live in.'¹⁾

Ritson's reading was, from the very first, largely in early printed books and ancient manuscripts. From historical antiquities he soon turned to poetry, romances, and literary origins. By the time he began to publish the results of his researches he had acquired an extensive acquaintance with the material of a little-known period in the history of English literature, and had accumulated a valuable collection of ancient romances. His first projected work, of importance to literary antiquarianism, was 'Fabularum Romanensium Bibliotheca: a general catalogue of old romances, French, Italian, Spanish, and English', in two volumes. A specimen of two pages of this publication appeared in 1782, but the whole work was never printed.²⁾

1. 'Letters', I.38.

2. This manuscript did not appear in the catalog of the sale of Ritson's library.

At this same time Ritson had another work in hand, the publication of which made him widely known, both favorably and unfavorably. On August 6, 1782, he wrote to Harrison: 'I have at last put my libel upon Warton into the hands of a bookseller. It is in a fair way of seeing the light by Christmas.'¹) The publisher's speed exceeded his expectations, however, and within two months there appeared anonymously: 'Observations on the three first volumes of the History of English Poetry, in a familiar letter to the author.'

With a wide familiarity with first sources in literature and history, and with a mind stored with ancient learning, Ritson took up the volumes of Warton's 'History of English Poetry.' He found them abounding in errors and inaccuracies of greater or less magnitude, but all of them inexcusable in the eyes of one whose habit of minute accuracy, even in the smallest detail, had become so deeply grounded as to cause him to expect and demand the same exactness in others. These errors, noted as they occur, form the substance of the 'Observations'. Ritson's enthusiasm for precision, however, led him into grievous excesses of language. He was unable to restrain his disgust at Warton's laxity and carelessness and became indignant at what he construed as ignorance and dishonesty. As a consequence there is an abundance of virulence and vituperation. He exhibited an unexampled irascibility of temper, and indulged in personal taunts entirely uncalled for

1. 'Letters', I. 52.

and wholly indefensible. Some of his exaggerated statements are more indicative of the schoolboy than the serious critic. Such hyperboles as this are not infrequent: 'Cotgrave undoubtedly knew a thousand million times more ~~on~~ the matter than you can do.'¹⁾ But Ritson's exaggerations, his spleen and ill-nature, indefensible as these are, by no means excuse Warton's blunders. Stripped of its abusive language the 'Observations' reveals some not inconsequential errors in the 'History of English Poetry', and exposes faults in handling material, which, unhappily were not limited to this Historian.

Warton was forced to begin his History with the Norman Conquest because he was ignorant of Anglo-Saxon. He felt the deficiency and excused himself on the ground that the 'Saxon language was familiar only to a few learned antiquarians.'²⁾ Such an excuse would not satisfy Ritson who insisted that no man undertake a task until he was thoroughly prepared to do it well. Warton's ignorance of Old English was a further handicap. It affected his accuracy in the Middle English period and caused him to make numerous mistakes in glossing the old poems. To cite but one example - in the following line from the romance of 'Richard Coeur

1. 'Observations', p.7.

2. Thomas Warton 'History of English Poetry from the close of the eleventh to the commencement of the eighteenth century.' 3 volumes. London. 1774-1781. Preface vi. For a further justification of Warton see Clarissa Rinaker, 'Thomas Warton, a Biographical and Critical Study', U.of I. dissertation, 1913. p. 185 n.

de Lyon',

'A faucon brode in honde he bare '

Warton interpreted 'faucon' to be a 'falcon', a bird, and devoted a whole page to substantiate his view,¹⁾ when in reality it means, as Ritson explained, 'falchion', a sword.²⁾ Errors of this kind the critic rightly ascribed not to misunderstanding of the text, but to lack of understanding.

Warton's ignorance was also evident in his handling of the ancient romances. He really knew more about them than his treatment indicates, but he was too prone to rely upon the statement of friends or take his material from catalogues rather than go to the trouble of investigating the manuscript itself, and verifying his information. Ritson's wide familiarity in the romance field enabled him to detect Warton's errors with ease. He might have pardoned a few slips but he could not countenance the indolence that caused him repeatedly to fall into anachronisms and inconsistencies. He prided himself on his own painstaking accuracy, a qualification which he considered indispensable to the historian, and could not forego an occasional sneer at Warton's loose methods. In calling attention to one inaccuracy he exclaimed: 'We must have your history of England next.'³⁾

1. 'History of English Poetry', 135.

2. 'Observations', p.9.

3. Ibid, n.25.

It should be borne in mind that in this ancient field in which Warton was most deficient, Ritson was best prepared. His study had been almost exclusively in ancient lore, both historical and noetical. He had come to feel that the subject of a national history, whether noetical or political, ought to be of sufficient importance to require more than a moderate degree of accuracy and he was unwilling to excuse any historian for failure in this essential. It must be said that he is rather too fond of parading his own knowledge and taunting Warton with his ignorance; and he frequently assumes the patronizing attitude of the following extract: 'But I will, as I have often done, and shall, throughout my letter, have frequent occasion to do, give you a little information upon this subject, of which you seem very much in need.'¹

Next to ignorance, Warton was most frequently charged with plagiarism. In many minor instances Ritson accused him of unacknowledged borrowings. Sometimes the critic based his accusation on his general knowledge of the subject in hand, but more frequently he produced the evidence and by the parallel-passage method established his point beyond question. Of more significance to friends of Warton was the charge that he frequently copied both from the manuscripts and the printed books of Percy without a hint of his indebtedness. The most serious instance of this was his insertion of the ballad of 'King Richard', purporting to be from a copy made for him at the British Museum. Ritson

1. 'Observations', n. 25

noticed that Warton's ballad was an exact duplicate - even to the same variations in spelling and the omission of a stanza, - of the one printed earlier in Percy's 'Reliques', and concluded that he had copied it from that collection. Against these accusations Warton's biographers have been eager to defend him. The minor cases, they say, are due to his habitual negligence - he never was careful to make exact notes of his obligations. The Percy incident, upon which Ritson places some emphasis, does not imply wilful dishonesty on Warton's part. Instead, it is highly probable that Warton and Percy received their copies of the ballad from a common friend, who would, of course, have made them identical.¹⁾ Granting that the defense is satisfactory and that Warton is absolved from dishonesty and wilful transgression, not only in this but in all cases, yet the copies, similarities, and 'quotations' remain as facts. Few men of Ritson's day possessed the intimate knowledge of ancient historical and literary sources requisite for discovering them, and perhaps no one so unerringly as Ritson could have pointed them out.

In literary matters Ritson was a pretty thorough skeptic. He allowed the validity of no inference or conjecture until it had been substantiated by documentary evidence. If Warton made vague or indefinite allusion to a book or manuscript, the Observer

1. See Mant, 'Poetical Works of Thomas Warton', 1802. Preface, lxxviii; Rinker, p. 297.

immediately questioned his ever having seen it. Not only so, but he doubted and even denied the existence of manuscripts which he had not himself seen, and continued incredulous until convinced by ocular or other substantial proof. Such skepticism proved to be not wholly a negative quality in the days of Chatterton, Rowley, and Ireland; and Ritson was not in the least deceived by any of these clever forgers - an assertion which could be made for few of his contemporaries.

The only other charge in the 'Observations' that need be mentioned separately is Ritson's impeachment of Warton's motive in including much material which the Critic considered superfluous. Warton did fall easily into digression, and his side excursions were usually long. But there was no reason for deciding, as Ritson hastily did, that the digressions were introduced merely 'to enhance the bulk and price of his writings.'¹) The critic was extremely vexed at the long dissertation, of ninety-seven pages, on the 'Gesta Romanorum', prefixed to the third volume. This he called satirically, a 'pretty reasonable assistant', asserting that it had no particular connection with the history of English poetry in the sixteenth century, but was inserted because 'it serves to fill up the volume, and that's enough.'²) He likewise objected to the inclusion of foreign poets

1. 'Observations', p. 33.

2. Ibid, p. 29.

in this History, asserting that the digression on Dante,¹⁾ was injected as a space-filler. But here Ritson's failure to appreciate the value of the comparative study of literature - which he came afterward to understand and to apply in his own criticisms -²⁾ led him into the grievous error of attributing to Warton the habits of the meanest hack-writer.

In addition to the serious charges of ignorance, plagiarism, and padding, there were numerous criticisms of less importance. Among such are the detection of erroneous dates, misprintings, and inaccurate and vague statements. That some errors of this nature were inevitable in so large a work as the 'History of English Poetry', and especially so in the period in which that work appeared, is readily granted. It may be even conceded that there was not a greater proportion of inaccuracies in it than in other books of the day. But it will hardly be denied that the proportion of mistakes is greater than it should have been.³⁾ If literary scholarship was ever to be freed from ~~its~~ editorial laxity and carelessness it was necessary for some one to call attention to these vices and demonstrate the virtue of accuracy and fidelity even in details. Ritson was the first to attract notice by an

1. 'History of English Poetry', III. 255.

2. See the historical Essays discussed in Chapter VII.

3. Any attempt to estimate the importance of Ritson's volume by a mathematical computation of the proportion of errors cited to the whole work criticized, (See 'History of English Poetry', 1824, Price's Preface, p. 20 n.: Rinaker, p. 295.) is necessarily inadequate. The real importance of the work inheres not in the number of errors exposed, but in the fact that an effective exposure was made.

attack upon the editorial short-comings of his contemporaries: and the reformed practise of the last years of the eighteenth century had its inception in his precept and example.¹⁾

Ritson's 'Observations' appeared in October, 1782, and was almost immediately commented upon ^{by} the magazines.²⁾ The remarks are noticeably similar in content and in tone. The Reviewers are unanimous in deprecating the ill nature, violence and malignity of the Observer. His abusive language is variously attributed to ignorance, malice, and insanity, and it must be said that some of the writers are almost as virulent with the critic as he was with Warton. But at the same time no one denies the extreme accuracy and justness of the criticisms when stripped of their violent language. In fact, everywhere it is admitted, though sometimes grudgingly, that the substance of the work is good, and the result of the minute investigation of a scholar. And yet, it is sought to minimize the importance of the critic's contribution by saying that his productions are mere 'gleanings', 'the effect of a mind anxious about little things', and 'affect the value of the 'History of English Poetry' little if at all.'

1. Instances of the effects of Ritson's attacks in insuring greater accuracy in Percy, Pinkerton, and others will appear in the course of the subsequent discussion. Previous to Ritson, sporadic protests against plagiarism and inaccuracy had been made, but without noticeable effect. See 'Dunciad', I.127; H.G.Paul's 'John Dennis', n.72.

2. See Crit.Rev., 54.373-5; Gent.Mag., 52.532; Monthly Rev., 68. 186-7; London Rev., Feb., 1783, reprinted in European Mag., 3.126-30.

Among the first impulses, on reading a book full of carpings and ill-mannered criticisms of a work that deservedly stands high in public esteem is the desire to vindicate the victim, and to correct the corrector by turning his own weapons against him. The initiative in this method of handling Ritson and the 'Observations', was taken in a letter in the Gentleman's Magazine for November, 1782, signed 'Verax', and very plausibly attributed to Warton himself.¹⁾ This communication proved to be the beginning²⁾ of an epistolary discussion that was continued in the columns of the Gentleman's Magazine during the whole of the following year.³⁾

Although the editor, in dismissing the subject, declared that he had sufficiently shown his impartiality in the controversy, only three of the eleven letters published defended Ritson. It was literally true, as one of the correspondents remarked, that Warton had 'unkennelled a pack of literary blood-hounds that seemed determined to hunt his less-friended antagonist to death.'⁴⁾ Among others the combatants included, on Warton's side, his brother Joseph, the Rev. Thomas Russel of New College, Oxford, and the

1. On Nov. 3rd, 1782, Warton wrote to Nichols asking the 'very singular favor' of the insertion of an enclosed letter 'in this month's Gentleman's Magazine', urging the absolute necessity of so early an appearance, and enjoining strict secrecy in the whole transaction. See 'Literary Illustrations', IV. 739.

2. Dr. Rinkler says that Warton was 'afterwards drawn into the controversy' in the Gentleman's Magazine. See Thomas Warton, p. 45.

3. See Vol. 52; pp. 527-8, 571-5; Vol. 53. pp. 42-7, 126-7, 281-4, 416; also Vol. 95. pp. 486-8.

4. Gentleman's Magazine, 53. p. 45.

Rev. John Bowle;¹⁾ and on Ritson's, the critic himself, and his friend John Baynes,²⁾ of Gray's Inn. The controversy was characterized by a good deal of violence which caused the writers at times to lose sight of their subject and indulge in personal taunts and abusive flings at one another. Most of the correspondents played the role of advocates, and, holding briefs for their respective clients they were blinded, wilfully or no, to whatever virtues the opponent might possess. The less frenzied of the controversialists acknowledged that Warton's errors deserved reprehension and admitted that Ritson displayed great learning and critical acumen in detecting them, though he was to be censured for presenting his material in an ungentlemanly manner. With the more radical the dispute centered mainly upon particular criticisms. Of these Ritson's challenge to Warton to prove his statement that 'anciently in England ladies were sheriffs of counties'³⁾ and his denial of the existence of such a person as Messen Jordi ⁴⁾ received most attention. These and similar points were established

1. 'Don' Bowle, 1725-1788, published in 1781, an elegant six volume edition of 'Don Quixote' in Spanish. He was bitterly attacked by Joseph Barretti as 'Tolondron', and finally confessed that he had falsely claimed to be the editor of the work and was in reality only its publisher. D.N.B. article 'Bowle'; 'Lit. Anec.' VI. 182.

2. John Baynes, 1758-1787, special pleader of Gray's Inn, was a miscellaneous writer of some note. At his death he bequeathed to Ritson a very curious collection of old romances. See 'Lit. Anec.' VIII. 113-115.

3. 'Observations', p. 10.

4. Ibid, p. 30.

by the contestants for both sides by the simple and obvious expedient of placing their own construction upon whatever evidence was presented.

This logomachy was marked by the intemperance and violence, and often by the coarseness and scurrility which characterized most of the literary controversies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ritson was justly censured, on the grounds of common decency, for dragging obscene material 1) into his work. His eccentric spelling and altered grammatical distinctions 2) have little other authority to support them than personal whim. He is unwarrantably ^{ab} vicious in many of his thrusts at Warton. But these violations of propriety are hardly sufficient justification for his opponents' falling into the very errors for which they reproach him. Their most flagrant and most persistently reiterated abuse is that of imputing to him motives of personal animosity. It is equally absurd to conjecture that he was 'angry that a history of our poetry should have been undertaken by a scholar of polite taste and not by a pedant' 3) and to declare that the 'Observations' was intended to depreciate an individual

1. Marlow's tenets, n.40; Scoggin's test, p.20 n.; etc.

2. For the first instance of Ritson's eccentric spelling see ante n.14. The outstanding peculiarity of the orthography of 'Observations' is the use of 'hissself', 'theirselves', etc. for 'himself', 'themselves', etc. Robert Lowth, 1710-1787, in his 'Short Introduction to English Grammar', 1762, admits the use of such constructions, but nowhere uses them himself.

3. Critical Review, 54.373.

and not benefit the public.'¹⁾ Ritson had no conceivable reason for personal enmity to Warton, and it is only justice to take at their face value these words in the opening paragraph of his letter: 'Personal motives I cannot possibly have been influenced by, and utterly disavow. And were you able to falsify every charge I have here brought against you, whatever might be your severity, I should kiss the rod with resignation and even pleasure: as, I assure you, the satisfaction I should have experienced, in finding your work entirely free from error, would have been infinitely beyond any I can be supposed to feel, in thus making myself the public instrument of its detection.'²⁾

There is difference of opinion as to the effect of Ritson's attack upon Warton himself. Bishop Percy and Thomas Caldecott of New College, both friends of Warton, were of the opinion that Ritson's pamphlet caused him to abandon the History in its incomplete stage at the third volume.³⁾ Mant, author of the first Memoir of the Historian, declared 'that an intimate friend of Mr. Warton has informed me, that he neither allowed the justness, nor felt, though he might lament, the keenness of the censure.'⁴⁾ Dr. Rinkler, Warton's latest biographer, suggests

1. Park's note to the Preface to 'English Songs', p. xxxviii.
2. 'Observations', p. 1-2.
3. Thomas Caldecott to Thomas Percy, March 21, 1803, and Thomas Percy to Thomas Caldecott, August 17, 1803, 'Lit. Ilust.' VIII. 372.
4. Mant, 'Poetical Works of Warton', p. lxxvii.

'the distraction of his interest to other fields',¹⁾ as the most plausible explanation of his neglect of the work. Warton's only personal remark occurs in a letter to George Steevens, who had given him considerable information about Ritson. There he declares that he 'could disprove most of his(Ritson's) objections were it a matter of any consequence.'²⁾ That he felt the censure more keenly than he cared to admit is evinced by the fact that this statement was written five days after he had dispatched to the Gentleman's Magazine the pseudonymous letter already cited, in which he attempted to reestablish many of the points Ritson had attacked.

Ritson's treatment at the hands of later editors of Warton has been somewhat more just but not wholly impartial. Thomas Park planned to include Ritson's notes in his edition of the 'History of English Poetry.'³⁾ Although this project was never carried out, it appears from Park's subsequent publications that he had little sympathy with Ritson's work. Richard Price, although using numerous notes from Ritson in his edition of the 'History', 1824, indulged, in the Preface, in an extremely ill-natured and malicious attack upon the antiquary, conjuring up all his personal faults against him. The unjustness of this treatment was very ably exposed by a writer in the Gentleman's Magazine,

1. 'Thomas Warton', p. 45.

2. Thomas Warton to George Steevens, Nov. 8, 1782: quoted by Rinkler, p. 44 n.

3. Athenaeum, 5.245. May, 1809.

signing himself 'Ritsonianus'.1). The substantial body of Ritson's corrections is included in the 1840, and 1874 editions of the 'History of English Poetry', where he is given credit for what he actually contributed without an attempt to depreciate ~~its~~ ^{his} importance by recalling the private sins for which he may be held accountable.

If there is divided opinion on the effect upon Warton, of the 'Observations', and the storm it aroused, there are equally divergent judgments on the question of their reaction upon their author. Haslewood asserts that Ritson afterwards became convinced of the unjustness of his attack on Warton, and 'the reasoning of his frank friend, Mr. Park drew from him an acknowledgment of his own impropriety, and induce him, at a later period, to buy up and destroy all the copies of the work that could be obtained.'2) Support is given this view by Ellis's confession that his anger at Ritson's attack on the Historian was mollified by the critic's repentance:3) ^{and} by Anderson's statement that he had heard Ritson speak of Warton 'in a placable and penitential way.'4) Ritson's nephew, however, denied that his uncle ever repented, and Nicolas attributed the statement to 'an amiable motive to extenuate the conduct of Ritson, which, nevertheless, fails because it happens

1. Gentleman's Magazine, 95. 486-9.

2. Haslewood, p.7.

3. Ellis to Thomas Park, Sept. 27, 1799, quoted by Haslewood, p. 27n.

4. Anderson to Percy, May 21, 1803, 'Lit. Illust.' VII. 113. There is no evidence to support the view set forth in an unsigned article in the Encyclopedia Britannica that the storm of anger aroused by his criticisms greatly delighted Ritson.' See article 'Ritson'.

to be without foundation.'1) In view of these contradictions, and in the want of evidence that Ritson went so far as to destroy the available copies of the book, our only opportunity to determine how sincere his repentance was, - if indeed he did repent - lies in a review of his later allusions to Warton.

On hearing of Warton's death Ritson wrote to his friend Walker: 'Well! I war not with the dead', and shall treat his ashes with the reverence I ought possibly to have bestowed on his person. Unfortunately, he is introduced not always in the most serious or respectful manner, in a work which has been long printed, but which I think my book-seller does not choose to publish till both the editor and all his friends are buried in oblivion.'2) The work to which he refers, 'Ancient Songs and Ballads from the time of King Henry III to the Revolution',3) was printed in two volumes in 1787, but not published until 1792. The material for these volumes was amassed at least three years before the laureate's death, and at a time when the editor could have had no thought of that event. Though tardy, the expression of regret at his flippancy and disrespect is highly creditable to his character. Later

1. Nicolas, xxiii.

2. 'Letters', I.169.

3. Ritson has several comments on Warton in his 'English Songs' and 'Remarks' on Shakespeare, both published in 1783, but it is obvious that they will throw no light on the question in hand because those works were in preparation simultaneously with the 'Observations' and he could not then have anticipated the full effect of the latter publication.

editors of the 'Ancient Songs', evidently guided by Ritson's implied wish, have omitted the allusion to Warton.¹⁾

In the preface to his edition of the 'Poems of Lawrence Minot', published in 1795, Ritson criticizes Warton's handling of these poems in his 'History', and points out some errors which he ascribes to misjudgment and ignorance. The language here employed is plain and direct, but in no wise meant to give offense. When compared with that of the 'Observations' it may without the least danger of overpraise, be characterized as 'softened asperity and tempered virulence.'²⁾

But the change of spirit which Ritson had manifested in his remarks on the death of Warton; in the preface to 'Minot's Poems'; and in comments to friends, is not evident in his latest publications. After a period of editorial inactivity comprising seven years of severe illness which left his faculties impaired, he published 'Ancient English Metrical Romances' and 'Bibliographia Poetica', 1802. In both these works Ritson displays an acerbity of language which is not exceeded in the 'Observations'. He devotes several pages of the 'Essay on Romances'³⁾ to a refutation of Warton's theory that romance originated with the Arabians, concluding his characterization of Warton's dissertation with

1. The most offensive notes occurred on pages 37 and 286 of the original edition. The only reference to Warton in the second edition, 1829, is a very brief and eminently civil allusion. Vol. II. p. 233.

2. See Mant lxvii. Dr. Rinkler holds that the more favorable attitude toward Warton in this publication is only feigned. See p. 299 n.

3. 'Ancient English Metrical Romances', Vol. I. p. 12 ff.

these words: 'In all this high-flown panegyric there is not a word of truth, nor a particle of common sense.' In the preparation of 'Bibliographia Poetica' Ritson was assisted by Douce and Park, both of whom read the manuscript. Park declares that he blotted out a 'severe sarcasm against Warton's mendacious 'History of English Poetry', which Ritson forebore to reinstate.'¹⁾ Either on this or a previous occasion Ritson expressed to Park his regret for his disrespectful treatment of Warton; but even such an acknowledgment of contrition did not save Ritson from castigation at the hands of Park. In the 1813 edition of Ritson's 'English Songs' Park is careful to disclaim any desire to disturb the ashes of the author whose works he edits, or 'to scatter seeds of acornite where the willow and the cypress overshadow', and yet what bays and laurels he has to bestow are all given to the opponents of Ritson while he is treated with scant courtesy indeed. In Park's failure to complete his edition of the 'History of English Poetry' we are deprived of the work in which, as an 'editorial advocate', he was to 'rebut a regular indictment, comprising seventeen counts, against the veracity of our poetical historian.'²⁾ It appears, then, that although Ritson confessed regret at his treatment of Warton and actually took some steps to make good his reparation, the illness of his later years prevented his completing it.

1. Haslewood, n. 27.

2. Advertisement to 'English Songs', 1813.

It has been contended that Ritson was not competent to judge the 'History of English Poetry' because he did not ~~knew~~ it as a whole, but only saw it as so many separate minutæ. But Ritson did not attempt a criticism of the 'History' on any comprehensive scale. His work was avowedly the detecting of errors of commission, and the finding of faults, which, though minute, detract from the accuracy of a work, and hence diminish its value for the careful student and conscientious reader. That Ritson succeeded in this task no one has denied. But many have been ignorant of, or have ignored, the fact that this and not something more ambitious was what he set out to accomplish. It is not the greatest type of criticism, perhaps not even great, but such as it is, it ought to be judged on its merits. It is task work that must be done, and at this particular time in the history of English literature it needed especially to be done.

CHAPTER IV.

Shakespeare Criticisms.

Before the vigor of the discussion of his attack upon Warton had begun to wane, Ritson issued a second controversial pamphlet: 'Remarks, Critical and Illustrative, on the Texts and Notes of the Last Edition of Shakspeare.' The object of this attack was the Johnson and Steevens' 'Shakspeare' of 1778,¹) and the method pursued was substantially that followed in the Warton tract. In a well written Preface Ritson justified his publication on the ground that the scattered notes which it contained tended to establish a perfected text of Shakespeare, and by their minuteness and accuracy would stimulate future editors to greater care and exactness than had previously been practised. His quarrel with all former editors of Shakespeare was that they had laid claim to the honor of having 'improved', 'restored' and 'perfected' the text by careful collation of the old editions, when in reality, their ignorance and natural indolence had caused them rather to corrupt it. With the self-advertising of these men, Ritson had no patience. They had each one boasted, as deserving the highest praise, the performance of a task which he considered it their simple duty as editors to perform. 'The chief and fundamental

1. 'The plays of William Shakespear in ten volumes with the corrections and illustrations of various commentators: to which are added notes by S. Johnson and G. Steevens.' Second edition revised and augmented. London, 1778.

business of an editor', he declared, 'is carefully to collate the original and authentic editions of his author. It is otherwise impossible for him to be certain that he is giving the genuine text, because he does not know what that text is.'¹⁾ But although all of the eight 'professed editors' of Shakespeare had taken the credit of collation, yet the old copies 'have never been collated by any one of them: no, not even either of the two first folios, books indifferently common, and quoted by everybody.' Because they professed what they had never undertaken, and because they had each one corrupted the text, Rowe, Pome, Theobald, Warburton, Hanmer, and Capell had been dishonored or forgotten. 'And where are they now?' asks Ritson. 'Where even Dr. Johnson and Mr. Steevens may, in the course of a few revolving years, be sent to accompany them: - the regions of oblivion or disgrace.' Ritson's comparative estimate of these men was not unjust; he considered Theobald the best of Shakespeare's editors, and Warburton and Hanmer the worst. But he had an unmistakably low opinion of the Johnson and Steevens' edition. If it is ever reissued, he said, 'it will continue, like those of Warburton and Hanmer, to dishonor criticism and to insult Shakespeare.'²⁾

1. 'Remarks', Preface ii.

2. That Ritson never gave over his aversion to this edition is pretty certain. On Jan. 19, 1786, he wrote to Isaac Reed: 'My antipathy to that edition (Johnson and Steevens') arises from the plan and nature of it, which neither has been nor possibly could be altered. I should like your edition very well, but I am never to be reconciled to that of Johnson and Steevens.' 'Letters', I. 107.

With characteristic frankness Ritson disavowed any personal motive in his remarks. He declared himself enlisted in 'the cause of Shakspeare and truth!'; and called Shakspeare the God of his idolatry. But he recognized that 'to controvert the opinions or disprove the assertions' of such men as Johnson, Steevens, Tyrwhitt, and Farmer, he must have some justification, especially where an undue warmth of expression was occasionally to be detected. In this, however, he considered that he was only exercising the right which these men before him had practised, and which it was the privilege of every man to exercise,- that of contradicting the opinions of his predecessors when they were thought or proved to be erroneous. But at the same time he was anxious to avoid the imputation of animus or of mean quibbling. In dealing with other men he declared he would 'not be found to have expressed himself in a manner inconsistent with a due sense of obligations and the profoundest respect. Such, at least, was his intention, such has been his endeavor, and such is his hope.'

Of the 457 notes in the 'Remarks' approximately half are concerned with emendations of the text. Steevens referred for

His opinion of the editorial abilities of Steevens is set forth in the following extract from the Dunciad, (I.165 ff.) which graces the title page of the 'Remarks':

'Ah, think not, Mistress, more true Dullness lies
In Folly's Cap, than Wisdom's grave disguise.
Like buoys, that never sink into the flood,
On learning's surface we but lie and nod.
For thee we dim the eyes, and stuff the head,
With all such reading as was never read:
For thee explain a thing till all men doubt it,
And write about it, Goddess, and about it.'

authority in textual matters mainly to the quartos, Ritson to the folios. This divergence in ultimate authority led occasionally to unnecessary altercation; but in general Ritson knew both the quartos and the folios more thoroughly than his rival. By his superior knowledge he was able, with remarkable precision, to trace back variant readings to their origin. Not infrequently where Steevens took unto himself the honor of an original emendation, Ritson unceremoniously pricked the bubble of his conceit by citing the identical correction in one of the folios or in some other early edition. The frequent occurrence of such instances caused Ritson to question the sincerity of Steevens's motives in claiming as his own, alterations that already ^{had} been made, and he was prone to overstep the bounds of literary propriety, not by boasting of his own perspicacity in detecting the deceptions, but by ridiculing Steevens' dulness in making the blunders.¹⁾

Ritson published three pamphlets containing critical notes on Shakespeare. Of these the 'Remarks' is greatest in bulk and is of most importance because it contains almost the whole of his contribution to Shakespeariana. A consideration of this volume will reveal both Ritson's characteristic attitude toward his fellow commentators and the nature of his own criticisms. Some of the notes are of intrinsic value, while others are interesting

1. Although he had scant commendation for Steevens, his praise of Johnson, Farmer, and Tyrwhitt was by no means stinted. See pp. 62, 100, etc. That he did not always agree with these men, will appear from the subsequent discussion.

mainly because they aroused discussion and were inserted again in one or both of the subsequent pamphlets.

The thorough corroboration of evidence upon which Ritson insisted is evinced in his criticism of Steevens for altering the spelling of the poet's name upon the questionable authority of the signature to the Will.¹⁾ Like Steevens, Ritson preferred 'Shakspeare' to 'Shakespeare', but he did not consider the will as conclusive evidence of Shakespeare's habitual manner of spelling, because it was most probably written 'in his last sickness, when he appears to have been so incapable of paying that attention to the writing of his name which a man in health usually does, that he has actually subscribed it two different ways.'²⁾ With the corroboration of the shorter spelling found in an autograph mortgage from Shakespeare, then in the possession of Garrick's widow, Ritson thought the proof sufficient.

The problem of filling out the meter of certain of Shakespeare's lines was a troublesome one, and gave rise to various suggestions by the commentators. Steevens, supported by Tyrwhitt, suggested that occasionally Shakespeare arbitrarily lengthened a word by one syllable to complete the meter. Tyrwhitt proposed the theory that 'this liberty was most frequently taken

1. The copy of the will here presented Ritson considered very defective. A perfect copy was one of his desiderata, and it was to be a conspicuous part of his own projected edition of Shakespeare. See post p. 125

2. 'Remarks', p. 1; 'Letters', II. 179.

with words 'in which l or r are(is) subjoined to another consonant.'¹⁾ For example:

Oh, how this spring of love resembleth ²⁾

The parts and graces of the wrestler ³⁾

Citations from the 'Faerie Queen' were adduced in support of the contention that this practise was common among the early writers.

Ritson agreed that many words must be pronounced differently from the present pronunciation in order to perfect the meter, but he denied that the early writers took liberties in 'extending' certain words, or that 'l or r plus a consonant' had anything to do with the matter. On the contrary, he maintained that all of Shakespeare's words were in accordance with the orthography and grammar of his time, and that if his commentators only knew the rules of grammar by which he was governed, they would not find it necessary to devise ingenious explanations for what was then common usage. One of these rules he formulated thus: 'Every verb in the English Language gains an additional syllable by its termination in est, eth, ed, ing, or (when formed into a substantive) in er: Thus, resemble makes resemble^teth; wrestle, wrestle-er; and settle, whistle, tickle, make settle-ed, whistle-ed, tickle-ed.'⁴⁾ While the unique theory here propounded was freely dis-

1. 'Shakespaere', 1778, I.p.139 n.

2. 'Two Gentlemen', I.iii.84. The references here used are to the text of the Rolfe edition.

3. 'As you like it'. II.ii.13.

4. 'Remarks', p.8.

cussed by Shakespeare students and somewhat further elaborated by Ritson in later publications,¹⁾ it met with little favor. Ritson himself made an accurate forecast of its reception as the mark of its author's eccentricity. When dismissing the subject from further comment in this first volume, he said: 'These ideas had they been more germane to the object of these sheets, or more likely to experience a favorable reception, might have been much expanded and further pursued; but, indeed, our orthographical system is so thoroughly corrupted, and the principles and formation of the language are, even by those who have professedly treated the subject, so little investigated or understood, that a writer, hardy enough to attempt a reform, will naturally expect to find many of his clearest axioms considered as the offspring of singularity, affectation and caprice.'²⁾

On the question of Shakespeare's learning Ritson agreed with the view set forth by Farmer.³⁾ He held that there is no conclusive evidence that Shakespeare was acquainted with any other language than English. That the poet attended Latin school is no indication that he was conversant with foreign languages; especially since it is possible to prove that all the plays in which the scraps of Latin and French occur were 'not originally written

1. Ritson did not anticipate the far-reaching effects of his unique theory here announced. See the discussion of 'Quip Modesty' and of 'Cursory Criticisms', in this chapter; and of Ritson's spelling in Chapter VIII.

2. 'Remarks', p.8.

3. 'An Essay on the learning of Shakespeare, addressed to Joseph Cradock, Esq.', London, 1767.

by Shakespeare.'1) Italian he knew no better than French or Latin. Of 'Julius Ceasar', Ritson remarked: 'the strange indiscriminate use of Italian and Roman names in this and other plays makes it obvious that the author was very little conversant in even the rudiments of either language.'2) Farmer avoided some of the outstanding difficulties of his theory by failing to apply it to 'Othello', 'Cymbeline', and 'Merchant of Venice'. But Ritson recognized that those who denied the learning of Shakespeare were at a loss to account for the way in which he became acquainted with the plots of these plays. Since no translations of the Italian 'Novelle' were known to have existed at Shakespeare's time, Ritson confessed his inability to answer the question.3)

Ritson praised Shakespeare for the broad-mindedness and liberality which made him tolerant of all parties and all creeds and enabled him to transcend the petty strife and turmoil of his day - to be not for an age but for all time. But the critic was unable to emulate the poet, and could not avoid expressing personal political and religious views in his comments. Because he

1. By this Ritson meant simply that Shakespeare had taken these plots, with their 'scraps of Latin and French', from English sources; not that he had worked over a contemporary play in some sort of collaboration.

2. 'Remarks', p.191; 'Letters', II.50.173.179.

3. The 1583-4 French, and the 1590 Spanish, translations of the 'Hecatomitha', had ^{they} been discovered in Ritson's day would not have aided him, for his theory excluded all languages but English. With regard to the other two plays, modern criticism has made little advance over Ritson. Malone's discovery of a 1603 translation of the 'Decameron' still rests on his own authority. Although no translation of 'Il Pecorone' is known, the bond story is said to have been widespread.

was so vigorous in denunciation of partisanship and narrowness wherever he thought he detected them, he laid himself open to the very charges he brought against those he criticized. He exhibited his personal bias when he denounced the law concerning suicides as 'the brutality of the most barbarous ages';¹⁾ declared the injustice of setting aside, by violence or mutual agreement, the lineal heir to the crown;²⁾ denied the validity of Henry the Fifth's claim to the throne of France;³⁾ held the English up to scornful ridicule for their inhuman treatment of Joan of Arc;⁴⁾ said of the much-maligned Dauphin that he was 'one of the best kings France ever had and England never had a better';⁴⁾ and asserted that the Revolution parliament by nullifying the 'indefeasible hereditary descent' of the crown had done more to destroy the constitution than any other parliament had done to preserve it.⁵⁾

But Ritson was even more rigorous in his remarks on religion. Having a strong dislike for Christianity and detesting professions of superiority on the part of any religious body, he not unnaturally saw in Shakespeare's indifference to creed one of his strongest claims to greatness. 'One of the many great excellencies of this immortal bard', he remarks, 'is that no author, ancient or modern, ever sacrificed less to the reigning superstition

1. 'Remarks', p.66.
2. Ibid, pp.84,137,188.
3. Ibid, p.104.
4. Ibid, p.114.
5. Ibid, p.124.

of the time than himself. Whatever may be the temporary religion, Polish or Protestant, Paganism or Christianity, if its professors have the slightest regard for virtue or genius, Shakespeare, the poet of nature, addicted to no system of bigotry, will always be a favorite.'1)

Both Johnson and Steevens were anxious in all their criticisms to vindicate Christianity; and they strove to bring Shakespeare into the fold of the orthodox. Their chagrin at not being able to do this on certain occasions, and their forced interpretations in order to insure the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, on others, afforded Ritson considerable mirth. Of Falstaff's 'If the fruit may be known by the tree, as the tree by the fruit, then there is virtue in that Falstaff', 2) Steevens remarked: 'I am afraid here is a profane allusion to the 33rd verse of the 12th chapter of St. Matthew.' 3) This exhibition of religious supersensitiveness amused Ritson almost as much as did Johnson's suggestion that the poet meant to punish Juliet's 'hypocrisy' by having her 'play most of her pranks under the appearance of religion.' 4) In these instances, as in most others, Ritson did not ridicule his opponents from mere personal animus. There was a guiding principle by which he acted; and this principle once accented there could be no disagreement with his conclusions.

1. 'Remarks', p. 188.
2. 'I Henry IV', II. iv. 426.
3. 'Shakespeare', 1778. V. p. 339 n.
4. Ibid, X. 128 n.

In this case he maintained that the critic or editor was under no obligations to apologize for the language of his text, the author alone being responsible for any profaneness there might be in his words: much less was it permissible for the editor to substitute words of his own in an endeavor to render the original less objectionable on moral or religious grounds. An author's text, Ritson believed, was his own property, sacred and inviolable, and not to be altered in the slightest save by his own hand. The question was never, what should ~~have~~ an author have written, but what did he write? This was a new and a correct standard by which to test editorial fitness. Ritson had set it up in his 'Observations' on Warter and throughout the twenty years of his literary activity he insisted upon judging editors by it.

Nevertheless Ritson's anti-religious zeal occasionally led him into excesses as grievous as those of Johnson and Steevens. If they were unduly anxious to relieve Shakspeare of any imputation on moral grounds, he endeavored to minimize the claims of Christianity to uniqueness in virtue. His attitude is well summarized in the following note. On Edgar's proposal to Edmund: 'Let us exchange charity', 1) Johnson had remarked: 'Our author by negligence gives his heathen the sentiments and practises of Christianity.' To which Ritson replied: 'Does the learned critic mean

1. 'King Lear', V.iii.168.



to insinuate that benevolence, or a forgiveness of injuries could not subsist without a belief in christianity? That heathens could not act like men? The contrary, it is believed, is so much a fact, that it would be no paradox to affirm, because it might be very easily proved, that all the moral virtues were better understood, and more regarded by Heathen Greece, and Pagan Rome, than they have been by any Christian state since the invention or introduction of that system. And what would the great philosopher think, if it were to be made appear that the first Christians borrowed (or, rather, stole, for they took without acknowledgment) all their morality from the professors of Paganism? Indeed it must be absurd to suppose for a single moment, that they who had more sense than their successors, had not, at least, as much virtue.'¹⁾

But with all his idiosyncrasies, and despite the personal bias of much of his criticism, Ritson was not devoid of a sympathetic appreciation of Shakespeare's characters and a grasp of the significance of each play as a whole. His notes are interspersed with happy bits of criticism which reveal a soul responsive to the appeal of poetry. Yet it was unfortunate that he seemed to require the stimulus of a judgment with which he did not agree in order to bring forth his own estimate. As a result his remarks frequently took on the nature of rebuttal. This gave

1. 'Remarks', p.173.

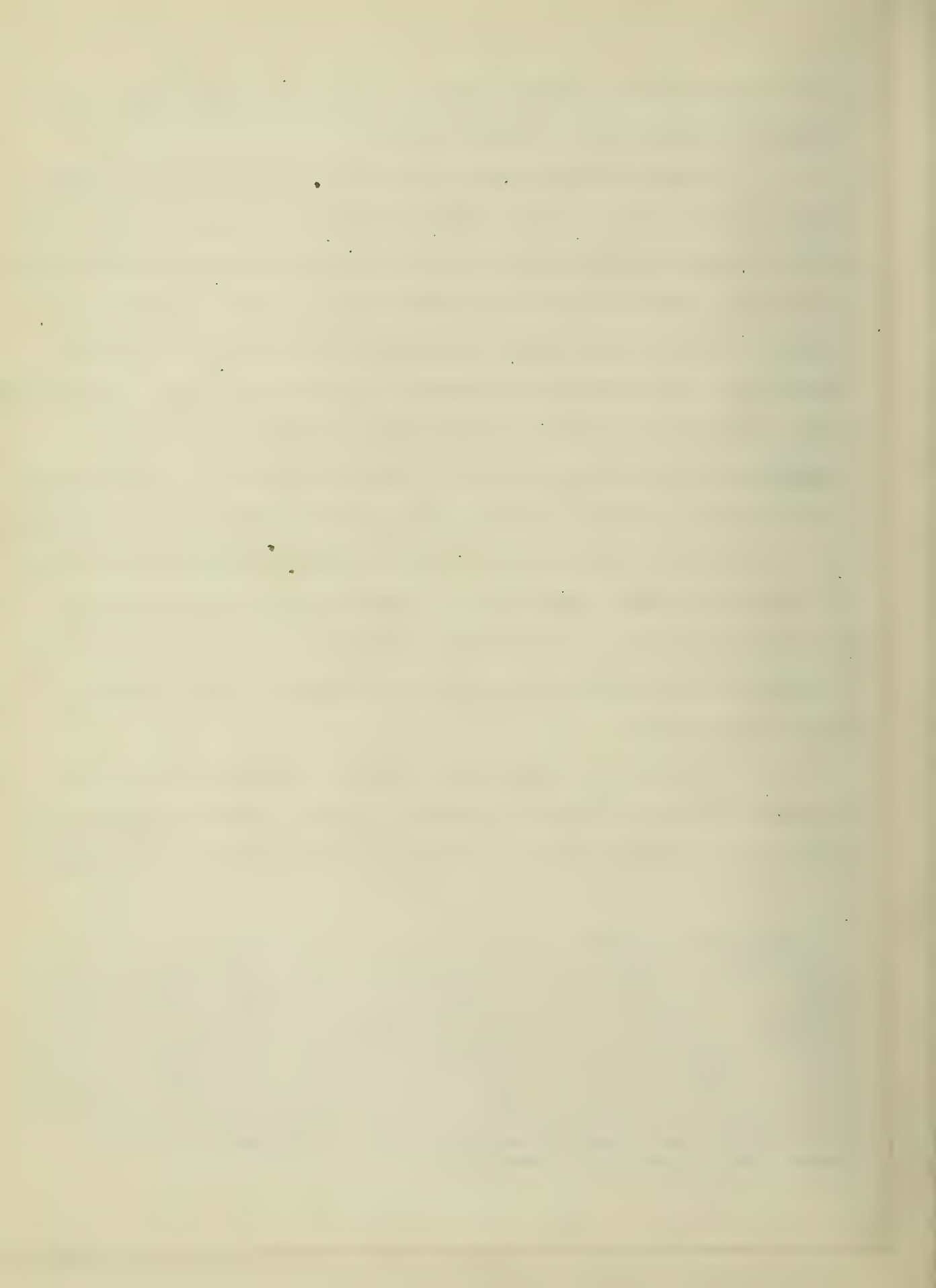
them a controversial flavor which in not a few instances caused readers to question their sincerity.

Ritson honored Dr. Johnson for the sturdy^d common sense which enabled him to brush away from simple passages the mass of difficult interpretations which more artificial thinkers had placed upon them. But he was not unmindful of the prosaic element in Johnson's nature which caused him at times to convert 'a fine expression into downright nonsense.' Johnson declared he had never been strongly agitated in reading Julius Caesar, and thought it 'somewhat cold and unaffecting.' Ritson answered in enthusiastic rebuttal: 'If there be any one play in these volumes which affects the heart more than the rest it may be safely averred to be this of 'Julius Caesar'. And he who is not agitated in perusing it' may defy the powers of poetry to move him.'¹⁾ Insensibility to its beauty and merit, he ascribed in Johnson's case, to some natural defect.²⁾

Steevens, in analyzing 'Hamlet', advanced the theory that the play was a study in immoral conduct and its dire consequences in a weak character. He argued that Hamlet was a youth

1. 'Remarks', p.146.

2. Although Boswell makes no mention of Ritson, there is more than a bare possibility that Johnson had met him personally. According to Nicolas (p.xxx) 'a note exists from Davies, the bookseller, to Ritson, stating that Johnson would be glad to see him on the following day, or on the ensuing Friday: and that he, Davies, would be happy to wait on him if convenient, probably to introduce them.' This note is not dated but there is no reason to suppose that anything Ritson had done before the publication of the 'Remarks' would have sufficiently attracted Johnson's attention to cause him to seek an introduction.



whose faculties had been impaired by the death of his father, the loss of an expected kingship, and the sense of shame resulting from the incestuous marriage of his mother. He made but one attempt to avenge his father, - when he mistook Polonius for the king. He deliberately procured the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He was responsible for the destruction and death of Ophelia, and outraged common decency by interrupting her funeral. And at last he killed the king to revenge himself and not his father. His own death the poet meant as a sacrifice for his immoral conduct. He is not deserving the pity of the reader or spectator because of the iniquitous means by which he finally accomplished his purpose.¹⁾

Such an interpretation was, to a worshipper of Shakespeare, nothing less than sacrilege. Ritson decried the want of reverence which Steevens had manifested and in a long review of the play justified Hamlet's conduct and contended that the poet's aim was to excite sympathy for a noble character prevented by circumstances beyond his control, from accomplishing his single and unrelenquished purpose - a character deserving the pity of the audience because of his virtue, his unparalleled misfortunes, and the final sacrifice of his own life to the deed he set out to perform. He writes:

'Hamlet, the only child of the late king, upon whose death he became lawfully entitled to the crown, had, it seems, ever since

1. 'Shakespeare', X. p. 411 ff.

that event, been in a state of melancholy, owing to excessive grief for the suddenness with which it had taken place, and an indignant horror at his mother's speedy and incestuous marriage. The spirit of the king his father appears, and makes him acquainted with the circumstances of his untimely fate, which he excites him to revenge: this Hamlet engages to do: an engagement it does not appear he ever forgot. To conceal, and, at a convenient time, to effect, his purpose, he counterfeits madness. He soon after espies the usurper at prayers, but resolves, and with great justice resolves, not to kill him in the very moment when he might be making his peace with heaven: inasmuch as a death so timed would have been rather a happiness than a punishment, and, by no means, a proper revenge for his father's murder. At the beginning of this conference (with his mother) he mistakes Polonius who was behind the arras, and about to alarm the household, for the usurper, and under that apprehension, stabs him. He is immediately sent off to England: and, in his passage, discovers the treacherous and fatal purpose of the commission with which his companion and pretended friends were charged. These men, he knew, had eagerly solicited and even thrust themselves upon this employment, and he had, of course, sufficient reason to conclude that they were well acquainted with the nature and purport of their fatal packet. His own safety depended on their removal: and, at such a time, and, under such circumstances, he would have been fully justified in using any means to procure it.

. Walking with his friend Horatio, through a church yard, he enters into conversation with a grave-digger; but presently, observing the approach of a funeral procession, he says to Horatio, to whom he was then speaking:

Soft, soft, aside. Here comes the King,
The queen, the courtiers. Who is this they follow?
And with such maimed rites? This doth betoken
The corse they follow, did with desperate hand
Foredo its own life. 'Twas of some estate.
Couch we a while, and mark.

. Laertes asking what ceremony else? Hamlet observes to Horatio, That is Laertes, a very noble youth. Laertes concluding his expostulation about the further honors with the following lines:

----lay her i' the earth:
And from her fair and unmolluted flesh
May violets spring! -- I tell thee, churlish priest
A ministering angel shall my sister be,
When thou liest howling:

Hamlet exclaims: What! the fair Ophelia? Laertes bids

----Treble woe
Fall ten times treble on that cursed head,
Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense
Deprived thee of:

an execration Hamlet cannot but perceive to be pointed at himself. Having uttered this curse, Laertes, hastily, and in direct violation of all decorum, jumps into the grave, where he 'rants and mouths it' like a player. This outrageous proceeding seems to infect Hamlet; who, forgetting himself, as he afterward, with sorrow, owns to Horatio, and by the 'bravery' of the other's grief being worked up 'into a towering passion', leaps in after him.

'The affection Hamlet~~s~~ now boasts for Ophelia~~â~~ was genuine and violent: we find him with the very same sentiments in the beginning of the play, and he has never once disowned it, except on a single occasion, when the sacrifice was required by his assumed character; a circumstance, which, cannot, at least ought not to, be imputed to him as a crime.

. . . . Hamlet, in a trial of skill with Laertes, receives an unexpected, a treacherous, and mortal wound. Immediately, before the company enter, he appears to be much troubled in mind: his spirits foreboding what was to happen: 'If it be now', says he, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now: if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all.' Being thus wounded, and on the threshold of futurity, if he had not killed the usurper immediately, the villain would have escaped unpunished. But he does not stab him for his treachery toward himself,- he upbraids him with his crimes of Incest and Murder,- and consigns him to the infernal regions,

With all his 'rank offences' thick upon him.

So that he sufficiently revenges his father, his mother(who, by the way, ~~dies~~, if not deservedly, at least unwittingly), and himself. As to his own fall, every reader or spectator must sympathize with Horatio, for the untimely loss of a youthful prince possessed of such great and amiable qualities, rendered miserable by such unparalleled misfortunes;

-----For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have prov'd most royally;

and who falls a sacrifice to the most base and infernal machinations. His death, however, is not to be looked upon as a punishment; the most innocent, as Shakespeare well knew, are frequently confounded with the most guilty; and the virtues of Hamlet were to be rewarded among those angels which his friend Horatio invokes to escort him to everlasting rest.'1)

This lengthy quotation is given because it reveals a phase of Ritson's character all too seldom discovered, and shows the eloquence he could attain to under proper stimulus. With more writing of this kind to his credit it would be unjust to say he was a man 'who lived on syllables', and who was devoid of the finer sensibilities of character.

However, it must in fairness be said that Ritson's forte was in the minutiae of criticism and not in the larger sweep of interpretation or appreciation. He had a knowledge of details and an acquaintance with the sources of Shakespeare material which would have done credit to any commentator. His chief object in all the criticisms was to restore the text as Shakespeare had left it. He frequently pointed out that an alteration made by some early editor had been followed without reason:2) and in many instances he proved that the unemended text was more intelli-

1. 'Remarks', pp.219-223.

2. 'Romeo and Juliet', I.iv.90. 'And eakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs' - after Pome. It should read bakes.

cible than that constructed by the critic.¹⁾ By means of his knowledge of grammar he corrected erroneous glosses;²⁾ and his familiarity with medieval literature enabled him to elucidate unfamiliar allusions.³⁾ With a few minor exceptions, all the notes in which he confined himself to standardizing the text by the folios are correct. But occasionally Ritson was tempted to clear up a troublesome passage by submitting an emendation of his own. In such cases he is more often wrong than right,⁴⁾ and it was these notes that were ignored or ridiculed by editors of Shakespeare.

Like most of Ritson's books, the 'Remarks' appeared without his name on the title page. However, he seems to have made no effort to conceal the authorship. On going to press he informed his friend Harrison of the nature of his new work, adding boastfully: 'I will turn the world upside down.'⁵⁾ It was not to be expected that Steevens, whose insinuating abuse had already dis-

1. 'Lear', I.i.230. 'Is it no more but this? a tardiness in nature' 'These two words (no more) seem to be introduced or preserved merely to spoil the measure. They are not in either folio.'-Ritson.

2. 'I Henry IV', II,ii.88. 'chuffs', not as Steevens says, a corruption of 'choughs', birds; but 'cuff' or 'chuff', clown.

3. On the pageant of the Nine Worthies, 'L.L.L.', V.ii.445 ff., Ritson gives a synopsis of the original drama with extracts from an unprinted manuscript of Edward IV's time.- MS. Tanner, 407.

4. 'Hamlet', III.i.162. 'Like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh'. Ritson thought it better to read time, with the quarto.- I have purposely limited these notes to one example each. They could be multiplied indefinitely.

5. 'Letters', I. 61. October 8, 1782.

posed of a brace of critical opponents 1) would leave this exposure of near 500 errors in his work unrefuted. He knew almost immediately that Ritson was the author of the attack, and spread the information among his friends. 2) Under the signature of 'Alciphron' he attacked the 'Remarks' in a letter to the St. James's Chronicle for June 5, 1783. 3) He charged that the commentary was confined to topics of a most trivial and insignificant nature; and that it explained nothing of any consequence to Shakespeare's real merit and character because not a single 'important and shining passage of Shakespeare' was the subject of any one of the elucidations. Ritson, signing himself 'Justice', replied that the design of the 'Remarks' was to prove the late edition of Shakespeare 'an execrable bad one; and this, I say, he had done.' 4) It is rather strange that in spite of attack and counter attack two men as solenetic as Steevens and Ritson should continue on friendly terms. That

1. In defense of Capell, John Collins (1741-1797) charged Steevens with plagiarism in a 'Letter to George Hardinge, Esq. on the subject of a passage in Mr. Steevens' Preface to his impression of Shakespeare.' London, 1777. Steevens never forgave this attack and let slip no opportunity to hurl violent epithets at Collins, relating disparaging anecdotes concerning him, and fathering upon him a number of highly questionable notes in the 1778 'Shakespeare'. Charles Jennens (1700-1773) made a similar accusation against Steevens, and the editor, not without some foundation, sneered at him unmercifully, both in reviews and newspapers. See Critical Review, 34, 475; 35, 230. and Public Advertiser for Jan. 26 and Feb. 14, 1771.

2. See the following letters: George Steevens to Thos. Warton, April 16, 1783, in John Wooll's 'Biographical Memoirs of Joseph Warton.' London, 1806, p. 398; John Bowle to Thos. Warton, May 18, 1783, *ibid.*, p. 402; M. Lort to Bishop Percy, May 19, 1783, 'Literary Illustrations', VII. 457.

3. Reprinted in Gentleman's Magazine, 53. 594.

4. St. James's Chronicle, June 10, 1783. reprinted in Gentleman's Magazine, 53. 595.

they did, is to the credit of both. Steevens kept Ritson informed of his various editorial undertakings and was from time to time rewarded with interesting notes on Shakespeare. Ritson maintained to the last an interest in Steevens, whose arguments he referred to as 'always ingenious and at least plausible, but, not in every way convincing.1)

The Warton controversy had brought Ritson into a prominence not altogether enviable, as a critic and antagonist and the criticism of this second pamphlet was largely influenced by the opinion already formed of its author.2) The Reviewers praised it for the minute accuracy and the learning it displayed, but unqualifiedly condemned it for the tone of offensive assurance with which the corrections were made.3) Upon one point all the writers insisted. In a few criticisms Ritson had been anticipated by Steevens and Malone in the two volume 'Supplement' of 1780. 4) Inasmuch as he showed his acquaintance with this work by devoting five notes to the first volume, the Reviewers concluded that they

1. Sidney Lee's statement (D.N.B.) that 'Ritson pursued with adverse criticisms all Steevens' editorial successes', is not supported by the evidence. See 'Letters', II. 32, 123, 171, 193. Also Advertisement to 'Bibliographia Poetica', 1802.

2. While the Reviewers did not openly mention Ritson, they attributed the work to 'Warton's Mastix' or the 'modern Zoilus', and ascribed its petulance to the 'ingenious writer' who had made a violent attack upon the 'History of English Poetry.'

3. See Gentleman's Magazine, 53, 503-5; Critical Review, 56, 81-9; Monthly Review, 70, 334-8.

4. 'Supplement to the edition of Shakespeare's plays published in 1778 by S. Johnson and G. Steevens . . . containing additional observations by several of the former commentators: to which are subjoined the genuine poems of the same author, and seven plays that have been ascribed to him; with notes by the editor (Malone) and others.' London, 1780.

had detected an instance of deliberate plagiarism in the work of the arch-enemy of plagiarists and editorial defaulters. It was a serious charge they brought against Ritson, doubly serious to him in whose eyes plagiarism was the unpardonable literary sin: 'the author has purloined from the Supplements of the very editors he censured, materials for correcting their errors.' But a candid review of the facts fails to place the critic in so bad a light. The 'Remarks' was put to the press as early as the first week in October, 1782,¹⁾ and was published in the spring of 1783. Malone's 'Second Supplement'²⁾ appeared early in the same year, antedating Ritson's volume by only a few weeks at the best. It is this work that contains the most of the 'purloined' notes (the first supplement being largely taken up with the apocryphal plays) and it is obvious that Ritson could not have seen it in time to make any changes in his own publication. But the Reviewers included this volume in their charge for they expressly refer to the 'Supplements'. Furthermore, it is by no means improbable that the few identical notes in the first 'Supplement' should have occurred simultaneously to Ritson and Malone (or Steevens), though working independently. This, in fact, was Ritson's defense. And he asserted emphatically: 'At the time of the publication of the book, I was not aware of being anticipated in more than a single instance, and even that one

1. See 'Letters', I.61.

2. 'A second appendix to Mr. Malone's Supplement to the last edition of the plays of Shakspeare, containing additional observations by the editor of the supplement.' London, 1783.

I thought my own.'1)

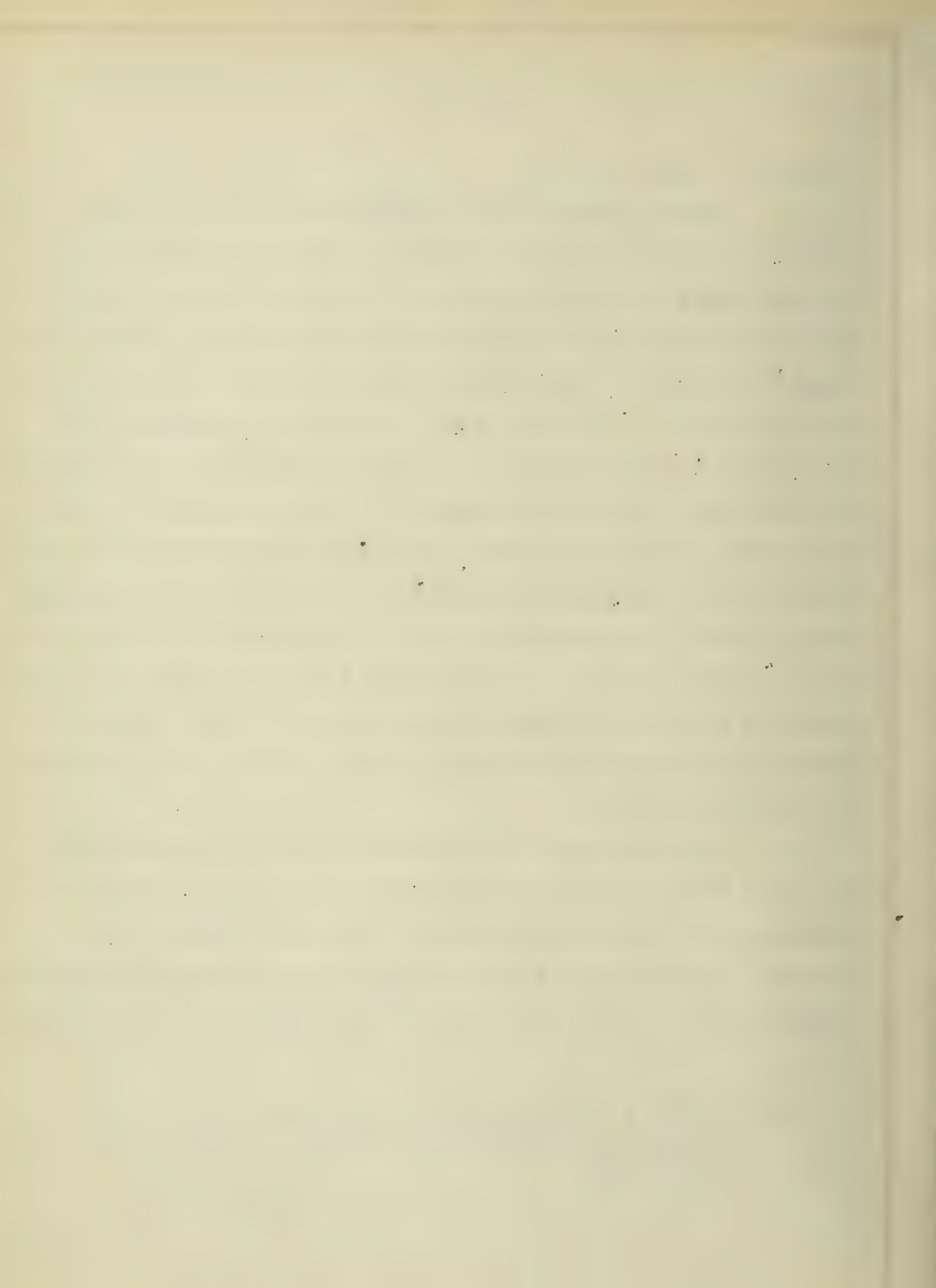
However, Ritson was far from insensible to his own shortcomings and made every effort to correct errors in his works when they were detected by himself or others. He seems never to have been wholly satisfied with the accuracy of the 'Remarks', and found it necessary to publish two lists of 'Errata', mostly typographical.²⁾ Yet he found a sort of melancholy pleasure in the conviction that his pamphlet was less inaccurate than the edition of Shakespeare which it criticized! He came eventually to feel that it was a publication quite unworthy of himself, and more than a decade after its appearance wrote to his nephew, who had undertaken to make some corrections in it: 'In behalf of the 'Remarks' I have nothing to say. Indeed, I should think you much better employed in putting them into the fire, than in a vain attempt to diminish the inaccuracies of such a mass of error, both typographical and authorial.'³⁾

That Ritson's criticisms were neither valueless nor unimportant is shown by the large number of them incorporated in subsequent editions of Shakespeare. Nearly 200 notes from the 'Remarks' were utilized in the reissue of the Johnson and Steevens 'Shakspeare' under the editorship of Isaac Reed, in 1785. But the

1. 'Quip Modest', Preface, p.v.

2. One, of eight, appeared in the 'Remarks' itself, another of 19, in the 'Quip Modest', 1788.

3. 'Letters', II.123.



few rejected notes were treated with such an air of peevishness that Ritson felt it absolutely necessary to come forward in vindication of them. Most commentators would have rested content with such a large acknowledgment of their accuracy and judgment and would have ignored whatever was said in justification of rejecting the omitted portions. But Ritson was far too sensitive to be able to do this. He viewed his publication as a father does his offspring and felt it his duty 'to defend every part of it from injury and misrepresentation.' In further justification of his retaliatory method, he said: 'I know of no difference between the integrity or character of a writer and that of any other individual, nor ought an unjust charge against the former to remain unrefuted, any more than one against the latter.'¹⁾

In self defense then, as much as to offer new notes on Shakespeare, Ritson published in 1798, 'The Quin Modest: a few words by way of Supplement to Remarks, Critical and Illustrative, on the Text and Notes of the last Edition of Shakespeare: occasioned by a republication of that edition, revised and augmented by the editor of Dodsley's Old Plays.' As its title suggests, the substance of this pamphlet consists mainly of answers to the Objections which had been made in the Shakespeare edition of 1785, to Ritson's 'Remarks', together with a few supplemental notes on various passages. The eleven new notes are about equally divided between

1. 'Quin Modest', Preface, v.

textual emendations and corrected glosses. The remainder of the volume is devoted to a reconsideration of twenty of the earlier 'Remarks'. With a frankness not often to be ascribed to his antagonists, Ritson confessed his errors wherever he had been convinced of them; 1) where confident that his position was correct he reinforced it with additional evidence. His judgment was not infallible; he was occasionally wrong but more often right. The foremost example of erroneous judgment is his reiteration, through half a dozen pages, of the unique orthographical system presented in the 'Remarks'. His purpose is twofold: to prove that Shakespeare did not arbitrarily lengthen his words to suit the meter, but that 'every word compounded upon the principles of the English language, always preserves the radical word unchanged': and to exhibit the need for a revisal of modern orthography. It is unnecessary to mention that Tyrwhitt had the support of scholarly opinion, and that Ritson's remarks were produced in support of a personal theory. 2)

As a typical instance of a just criticism repeated, may be cited the remarks on the mortality of fairies: 'Midsummer Night's Dream', II, i. 101. Steevens had remarked that 'fairies were not human, but they were yet subject to mortality.' Ritson replied that Shakespeare's fairies never die. In 'Quip Modest' he answered Steevens' rejoinder. Ritson was justified in concluding, from

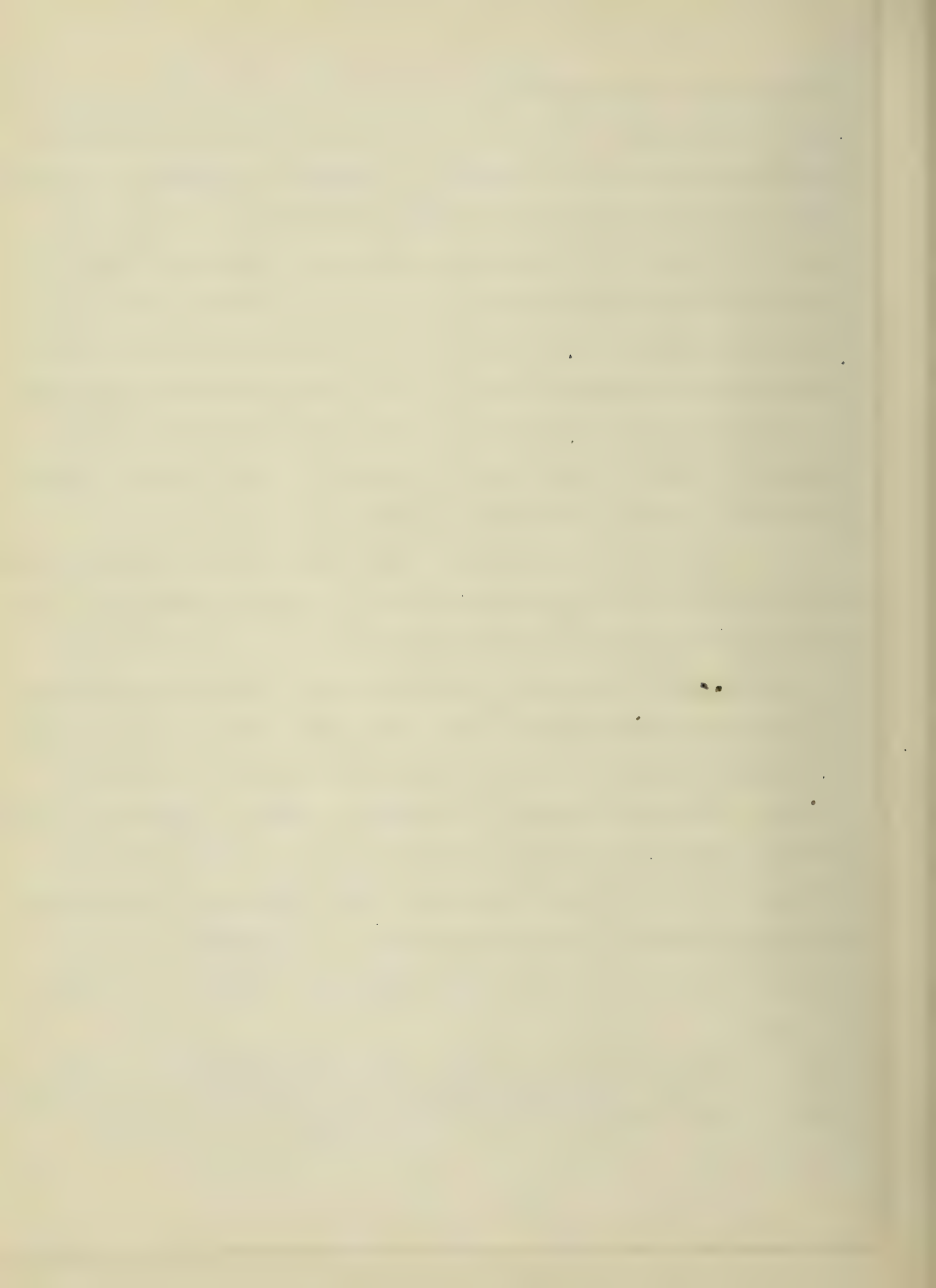
1. In seven notes he admits error. See note to 'King Lear', III, vi. 25 : 'I have printed ~~at the time~~ what I at the time hastily took to be the original song (Edg. 'Come o'er the bourn, Bessy, to me'): but I believe that no more than the four first lines are authentic, and that the remainder is a puritanical parody.' 'Quip Modest', n. 32.

2. See 'Quip Modest', nn. 1-6.

the remarks of Shakesneare's fairies on the mortality of humans, that the poet meant to set off by contrast their own immortality. He likewise exposed the weakness of Steevens' arguments by showing Shakesneare's fairies to be different from those of Spenser and 'Houn de Bordeaux'.¹⁾ The remainder of the notes are given similar though less extended treatment. But it was not the body of this work which attracted most attention, although practically all of its criticisms were made use of by the next editor of Shakesneare. It was the Preface, with its violent philippic against the Reviewers, its open assault upon Steevens, and its indirect attack upon Reed, in which immediate interest centered.

Ritson's own works had never been accorded the unalloyed praise he often saw bestowed upon less accurate productions. It was impossible for him to understand why of two works, the one only moderately correct but urbane in manner, the other flawless in fact but vituperative in tone, the less perfect should be the more highly praised. Quick to detect and anxious to punish any personal thrust at himself, he refused to grant to others the same privilege and indeed seemed not to know when he had spoken sufficiently sharply to give offense. That there was a considerable portion of conceit in his nature cannot be gainsaid, but his writings were not inspired by an inordinate egoism. He was em-

1. See 'Quip Modest', pp. 11-14. With a characteristic display of revengeful abuse Ritson alluded to this controversy in the 'Dissertation on Fairies' prefixed to 'Fairy Tales', 1831. See p. 42 ff.



listed in the cause of Truth and in her service he considered everything fair. If enthusiasm for his goddess sometimes led him beyond the bounds of literary propriety he either did not recognize it, or, recognizing, justified the means by the end. When the Reviewers persistently refused to take this view, and largely ignored the truth of his writings while they condemned his manner, he concluded that they were in league to destroy his literary and personal character. The critics seemed even to go out of their way to ridicule him. The Reed 'Shakespeare' in which Ritson felt himself very unjustly treated, was highly praised in the Reviews. Not only so, but disparaging mention was made of Ritson and his work. For the discussion with Tyrwhitt he was sneered at as an 'orthographic mutineer', and as a critic he was relegated to the ranks of the 'unimportant'.¹⁾

This was more than Ritson could endure in silence. The notes he had taken 'in turning over the revised edition immediately after its publication', but had lain aside and almost forgotten, were now brought forward and put to the press with a Preface in which he heaped scorn and invective on his 'small friends' the Reviewers. He accused them of 'passing sentence upon books which they never read, and on the character of writers whom they do not know.' He referred to them satirically as 'very good Christians, and my 'liberal and candid friends', but did not disdain to answer the charges they had brought against him.

1. Critical Review, 62, 321-9; 87. 19-25.

Of Steevens' share in the 1785 'Shakspeare', Ritson had little definite information. The notes in which he considered himself disrespectfully treated were signed with the editor's initials, but he did not think they came from Reed. On the contrary, he held that they were 'furnished by some obliging friend, who had desired to be effectually concealed under the sanction of the editor's signature.' That he believed Steevens to be the author of these notes appears from the following comment which was published in the first copies of the 'Quip Modest!': 'This worthy gentleman is probably the infamous scoundrel who published 'An address to the curious in ancient poetry',¹) as, however little relation it may have to Shakspeare, the author has had interest enough to procure it a place in the 'List of Detached Pieces of Criticism, etc.', prefixed to the revised edition. A congeniality of disposition in the Critical Reviewers procured this fellow a different reception from those literary hangmen, from that which he may one day experience from a well-known practical professor of the same mystery.'

After a few copies of the 'Quip Modest' had been sold, Ritson came to feel, or was persuaded, that this note was 'too strong for the person alluded to', and he stopped the sale of the work long enough to cancel this page and substitute another bear-

1. 'A familiar address to the curious in English Poetry, more particularly to the readers of Shakspeare.' By Thersites Literarius, London, 1784. This rather inconsequential tract was written in the first person, endeavoring to create the impression it was the work of Ritson, and gave him great offense.

ing the following note: 'Impressed as I have been with this idea, I ought in common to justice to acknowledge that I suspect no one in particular to whom I am thus indebted. Above all I wish to declare, that the candor, liberality, and politeness which distinguished ~~Mr.~~ Mr. Steevens, utterly exclude him from every imputation of this nature.' Because of this substitution, Malone some time afterward 1) expressed the belief that Ritson had the 'modesty to suppress' his work, but later 'repenting as it were of his repentance, he issued it out' again. Ritson indignantly denied that he had been inspired by 'modesty' or any other desire to suppress his book, and explained that its temporary withdrawal had been necessitated by the printer's substituting a new note for an objectionable one, and reprinting another page in which 'some erroneous references had been detected.' 2)

Besides the very abusive notes which he attributed to Steevens, there were three others with which Ritson made known his dissatisfaction. The author of these notes he did not know, and was loath to ascribe them to the pen of his friend Reed. Hearing that Ritson had taken offense, Reed wrote him a very cordial letter expressing regret that anything in his work should tend to alienate a friend. But he nowhere denied having written the notes to which Ritson objected, and indeed, the whole tenor of his letter

1. See 'Shakspeare', 1790. Vol. I, part I, p. 249.

2. 'Cursory Criticisms', p. 27. The first cancelled sheet (pp. iii-iv) contained a list of 27 errata in the 1785 'Shakspeare'. For this was substituted a rearranged and corrected list of 30. These two cancelled sheets (pp. iii and vii) are found in a very few copies of the 'Quip Modest'. My copy contains both.

implied that he was their author. Ritson replied that he had no desire to cause a disagreement, acknowledged the right of Reed and every other man to dispute his statements and point out his errors, but, he said, there was a difference between 'information' and 'attack'; and while he would thank any person for acquainting him that he had a hole in his stocking or some dirt on his face, he would not feel himself obliged if that person 'accompanied the information with a kick on the shin or a box on the ears.'¹) At Reed's suggestion that a common friend be designated to act as an arbitrator, Ritson turned over all future negotiations to John Baynes and endeavored to dismiss the matter from his mind: 'I shall dwell no longer on a subject which I would have given one of my fingers had never existed, and which for my own sake I shall endeavor as soon as possible to forget.'² There is no record of Baynes' activity, but at least he failed to bring the two men to a mutual understanding.

In the Preface to the 'Quip Modest' Ritson expressly stated that he did not hold Reed responsible for the most offensive notes in the Shakespeares edition which 'that respectable gentleman' had supervised, but added, alluding no doubt to the three notes which Reed had not disavowed: 'However, I doubt not there are many things in the following pages which I might have been allowed to say, without running any possible risk of giving offense to him:

1. 'Letters', I.107.

2. Ibid. I.108.

alive as an editor is on such occasions said to feel himself.'

Ritson was himself more 'alive' than perhaps any other editor of his day, and yet he seemed utterly incapable of conceiving that others might take offense at what would invariably anger him, if turned against his work. The offense given, he was prompt to apologize and to express regret at what he had done. But he did this on every occasion and seemed not to profit by the experience. Reed wrote immediately, disclaiming the authorship of the notes which had displeased Ritson, and voicing his surprise that their friendship had not been proof against such a misconception. Ritson's dignified and generous reply is best given in his own words: 'That I have ever thought and said that the notes at which I have taken offense could not proceed from you is a fact well known. I declared my belief of it to yourself in the letter I wrote soon after the publication of your Shakspeare; you could then, I thought, so easily have undeceived me, that your silence tended to authorize and confirm my belief. I cannot however doubt the assertion you now make - but I am more at a loss to account for ~~the~~² language and manner of your notes which so far as you were personally concerned were without the least provocation on my side and could not fail to give the most unfavorable impression of my character to every one who knew who was meant by the Author of the Remarks. It would surely have been generous and friendly at the least to have afforded me an opportunity of defending myself against the charges you thought me liable to, before the publication of the book, that I might have had a chance

of convincing you that the Remarks objected to were neither so false nor so foolish as they are there represented. You adopted a mode of conduct which it would have been perfectly natural to expect from Mr. Warton or Mr. Malone but certainly not from you. . .

'I should consider myself a person of neither honor or honesty if I had been actuated in this publication by the least spark of resentment against you and I beg leave to assure you that notwithstanding what has passed I shall still continue to preserve the respect and esteem to which your personal character and literary services have so just a claim.'¹⁾

If Ritson really believed his indecent slurs at the Reviewers (in the 'Quin Modest') would cause them to treat him with less freedom or ignore him altogether, he was a poor judge of human nature. If, on the other hand, he was wilfully provoking them to further unfavorable comments that he might have justification for a counter attack, he accomplished his purpose. By the critical Reviews²⁾ the work was treated in a half humorous way as an inconsequential production, and its author held up to view as a human curiosity, and a literary 'freak'. This much Ritson might have expected, and it ^{is} possible to conceive that he might not have felt called upon to reply to it. But the attitude of conscious superiority assumed by the Reviewers added insult to injury. This he might have expected too. It was what he had before objected to, and it was just the thing that harassed him most. In his view

1. The full text of this unpublished letter appears in Appendix A.

2. See Critical Review, 65, 407; Monthly Review, 79, 275.

it was beyond the pale of human possibility for any one to judge fairly, after only a casual perusal, a book which had been months, and perhaps years, in preparation. The presumptuousness of the Reviewers in doing this, he was bound to expose. His opportunity came in the publication of Malone's 'Shakspeare' in 1790.

Two years later Ritson issued a pamphlet of 104 pages entitled 'Cursory Criticisms on the edition of Shakspeare published by Edmond Malone'. There is prefixed a bitterly acrimonious letter 'To the Monthly and Critical Reviewers', for the purpose, he says, 'to induce you, Before you pass sentence on the following pages, to read them through : 'Strike, but hear!' As a title of a book, read in a newspaper, or through a shop window, may not be always a sufficient ground for unqualified condemnation and virulent abuse', Ritson had instructed his publishers to send each of the Reviewers a copy of his book. But on second thought he declares he might as well have saved himself the trouble, as Malone will most likely be allowed the 'grateful privilege' of reviewing it himself: 'the virtue and honor of this literary hero frequently condescending to bring down an unsuspecting enemy from the masked battery of a Review.' 'I consider you', he ~~says~~, 'as two formidable and mischievous gangs of nocturnal banditti, or invisible footpads, equally cowardly and malignant, who attack where there can be no defense, and assassinate or destroy where you can not blunder.'

Shakespeare's morality, in the hands of a Reviewer, is to be read backward, like a witch's prayer.'¹⁾

With Malone himself Ritson was scarcely less severe. He undertook the work with an avowed purpose to 'convict Malone, not to convince him'. His first attack was upon Malone's most glaring weakness, his 'total want of ear and judgment'. But it was less easy to prove that his collations of the text consisted mostly of 'replacing all the gross and palpable blunders of the first folio from which it has been the labor of such critics as Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Warburton, and Hanmer to purge the text.' In addition to this, he said, 'Malone' 'stands charged with other high crimes and misdemeanors against the divine majesty of our sovereign lord of the drama: with deforming his text, and degrading his margin, by intentional corruption, flagrant misrepresentation, malignant hypercriticism, and unexampled scurrility. . . . How sayest thou, culprit? Guilty or not guilty?'²⁾

Ritson recognized that he was dealing in a high-handed manner with a worthy writer and felt the necessity of a justification for the violence of his language. This he found in Malone's

1. This outburst is closely modeled on Dr. John Brown's (1715-1766) characterization of the Reviewers as 'two notorious gangs of monthly and critical book-thieves hackneyed in the ways of wickedness, who, in the rage of hunger and malice, first plunder, and then abuse, maim, or murder, every honest author who is possessed of ought worth their carrying off; yet by skulking among other vermin in cellars and garrets, keep their persons tolerably well out of sight, and thus escape the hands of literary justice.' 'An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times', 1758. II.p.75.

2. Preface, x.

treatment of him. In the margin and notes of the 1790 'Shakspeare' he is frequently referred to as a 'shallow' or 'half-informed remarker', and there are other allusions to his 'profound ignorance', his 'crude notions', and 'the slenderness of his criticisms'. With evident glee Ritson turned these epithets back upon Malone, remarking triumphantly: 'And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.'

Malone based his text on the first folio and maintained that the second was inferior and that its editor was 'entirely ignorant of Shakspeare's phraseology and meter.' In proof of this he produced numerous examples in which the second folio reading was corrupted, Ritson declared the second folio an improvement over the first. 'For one instance of an alteration for the worse,' he declared, 'it will be easy to produce ten instances of alterations for the better.'¹) He believed the first and second folios were printed by the same man, and that no one of the editors, if there were more than one, was in the least ignorant of Shakespeare's phraseology. Some of the examples Malone cited in support of his view, Ritson declared proved Malone's ignorance of Shakespeare's language and not the folio editor's. As to the knowledge of meter displayed by the second folio editor, Malone was on dangerous ground for he himself possessed a notoriously defective ear. Ritson devoted the first 26 pages of this pamphlet to citations from the

1. 'Cursory Criticisms', p.2.

two folios in which he declared, and nearly always with justice, that Malone had chosen the inferior reading.1)

Of the ninety-eight criticisms in the pamphlet, forty-two are based on Malone's faulty judgment of meter. The remainder are concerned with his treatment of the criticisms previously advanced in Ritson's 'Remarks' and 'Quin Modest'. Practically nothing is added to the arguments that had already appeared. They are un- handsomely revived by an author too prone to insist upon the absolute value of everything he published. After a hundred pages of vilification and abuse, in which Malone is referred to as the 'modest Hibernian', 'misconceiving, blundering foreigner', etc., Ritson declared he had 'endeavored as much as possible, to avoid all controversy', and concluded in mock modesty by asserting that he had by no means exposed all the errors in Malone's sheets, but that there remained many examples of 'profound ignorance, idle conjectures, crude notions, feeble attempts at jocularity, slender criticisms, shallow, half-informed, fond, skilless, tasteless and unfounded remarks',2) to repay the researches of any one who might think Malone or his edition worthy of any further notice.

1. Malone's defective judgment of meter is so well known that it is hardly necessary to cite examples. The following will illustrate Ritson's method:

'Tempest'

First folio: 'I'll shew thee every ^{fertile} inch o' th' island.'

Second folio: 'I'll shew thee every fertile inch o' th' ile.'

'Twelfth Night',

First: 'That methought her eyes had lost her tongue.'

Second: 'That sure methought her eyes had lost her tongue.'

2. 'Cursory Criticisms', p. 103. These are the epithets which Malone used in referring to Ritson's 'Remarks' and 'Quin Modest'.

Although the pamphlet was directly inscribed to the Reviewers, it was almost neglected by them. They dismissed Ritson and his billingsgate with the comment: 'We are well content with the abuse of such authors, and we can bid him farewell without feeling one spark of resentment.'¹) But Malone had more at stake than the Reviewers and was not willing to give over the contest so readily as they. In the St. James's Chronicle for March 27, 1792, appeared a letter in defense of Malone, signed 'Criticaster'. It has been attributed to Malone himself and may have been intended to engage Ritson and his friends in controversy. Magazine warfare had proved disastrous to Ritson, from the mere superiority of the enemy's numbers, if for no other reason, and no one came forward in his defense at this time. This article did not fully satisfy Malone's purposes and the next month he published 'A Letter to Richard Farmer, relative to the edition of Shakspeare, published in 1790, and some criticisms on that work.' As a rule temperate and suave, Malone occasionally condescended to return Ritson's ridicule and sarcasm in like kind, and charged his critic with 'the usual tricks of hypercriticism, that is, with unblushing cavil, false argument, and false quotation.' Malone stated that after infinite labor he had collated word for word the 100,000 lines of Shakspeare's plays and made 1654 emendations. Ritson was able to detect but thirteen errors, and of these, five were

1. See Critical Review, Series 2. Vol. IV. pp. 476-7; Monthly Review, 93. 111-112.

his own mistakes. 'So enormous a tax on industry', he remarked, 'has been rarely so successful in its efforts.'¹)

It is to Ritson's credit that he made no public reply to Malone's letter. On May 24, 1792, he sent Harrison a copy of the 'Cursory Criticisms' with the boastful comment: 'I flatter myself I have totally demolished the great Malone. He has attempted to answer it ('Cursory Criticisms') by the most contemptible thing in nature.'²) But Ritson did not condemn everything that Malone wrote, nor was he always so sanguine of his success in 'demolishing' him. That he was far from insensible to Malone's merit, and that he was not unwilling to give credit where credit was due, is amply attested by the following quotation from a letter to his nephew, written April 20, 1796: 'You will do Mr. Malone a great injustice if you suppose him to be in all respects what I may have endeavored to represent him in some. In order that he may recover your more favorable opinion, let me recommend to your perusal, the discussion, in his prolegomena, entitled 'Shakespeare, Ford and Jonson'; and his 'Dissertation on the three parts of King Henry the Sixth' (to which I am more indebted for an acquaintance with the manner of our great dramatic poet than to any thing I ever read.)'³) It is stated, on the authority of Nicolas, that Ritson carried out his repentance and made good his amend by buying up and destroying all the copies of 'Cursory Criticisms' that remained

1. See James Prior, 'Life of Edmond Malone', London, 1860, p. 185 ff.

2. 'Letters', I. 213.

3. Ibid, II. 122-3.

in the hands of his publishers.¹⁾

In the letter just quoted Ritson praised Malone's exposure of the Ireland forgeries: 'His recent enquiries into the Shakspearian forgeries evinces, also, considerable industry and acuteness, and is certainly worth your reading. I do not mean to say that there was any difficulty in the subject; but it has certainly derived importance from the ignorant presumption and cullibility of certain literary aristocrats who have considerable influence upon what is called the public.'

Ritson was one of the earliest visitors to the exhibit of Shakespeare materials arranged by the elder Ireland on Norfolk Street. From the very first he declared it his belief that the whole was a forgery concocted within the period since the publication of Malone's 'Shakspeare', by some person 'of genius and talents which ought to have been better employed.' However, he kept close watch on the developments in this 'uniquitous business' and not infrequently reported on its status to his friends outside of London.²⁾ Ritson had considerable amusement at the expense of the 'literary aristocrats' who were duped by Ireland,³⁾ and the impostor himself later praised Ritson's keenness, and confessed that it was almost impossible to maintain the counterfeit before the penetrating and searching glance of the antiquarian. Ireland

1. Nicolas, p. liii.

2. See 'Letters', II.75: 91-3, 140, 143-4.

3. See letter of Steevens to Percy, Dec. 26, 1796. 'Literary Illustrations', VII.9.

remarks, in his 'Confessions'¹): 'The sharp physiognomy, the piercing eye, and the silent scrutiny, of Mr. Ritson, filled me with a dread I had never before experienced. His questionings were laconic, but always to the purpose. No studied flow of words could draw him from his purpose: he was not to be hoodwinked: and after satisfying his curiosity, he departed from Mr. Samuel Ireland's house, without delivering any opinion, or committing himself in the smallest circumstance. In fine, I do as firmly believe that Mr. Ritson went away fully assured that the papers were spurious, as that I have existence at this moment.'

Ritson was always an enthusiastic student of Shakespeare. His letters abound in quotations from the plays.²) He knew thoroughly the critical material in the field, but his only contribution to Shakespeariana was the three pamphlets already discussed. His superiority as an emendator and annotator was amply attested by his editorial contemporaries. The first Shakespeare edition after each of his pamphlets incorporated a majority of the notes which it contained.³) Although Ritson's unfortunate attitude of controversy and antagonism reacted in his disfavor, he succeeded

1. 'The confessions of William Henry Ireland, containing the particulars of his fabrication of Shakespeare MSS: together with anecdotes and opinions (hitherto unpublished) of many distinguished persons, in the literary, political, and theatrical world.' London. 1805. p. 227.

2. See 'Letters', I, 144, 150, 167, 194, etc.: II. 31, 120, 154, 179, 193, etc.

3. Reed included half of the 'Remarks', 1783, in his edition of 1785: Malone, 1790, utilized Reed's selections as well as the most of the new material of the 'Guin Modest', 1788, and Steevens, 1793, made use of practically everything that had appeared in 'Cursory Criticisms', 1792, and its two predecessors.

in obtaining an acknowledgment, however grudging, of the most of his contributions. Later editors have lost the personal bias but the Ritson notes are more scattering than might be expected.¹⁾

Although Ritson's only publications of Shakesneare material were of detached pieces of criticism, yet he cherished the ambition to leave as a symbol of devotion, a complete edition of the 'god of his idolatry'. As early as 1782 he had formed such a design²⁾ but it was not until April 18, 1783, that he made known to the public his intention. At that time there appeared on the last page of his 'Remarks' a prospectus for 'an edition of the plays of William Shaksneare, with notes, preparing for the press.' The edition was to be in eight duodecimo volumes, based on the two first folios, with careful collation of the old quartos and an accurate statement of all the variations adopted. The orthography was to be reduced to a modern and uniform system; the notes, sparingly introduced, mostly extracted, with due acknowledgment, from previous commentators. It was to include the author's life 'with an exact copy of his will' and 'a new, copious, and accurate glossary.' In a separate volume was to appear 'a complete verbal index.' The claim which Ritson advance for his work was by no means an unambitious one: 'This edition will, with

1. The 'New Variorum' contains only a smattering of notes by Ritson.

2. Rowntree had asked for the loan of a Shakesneare. Ritson informed him, Nov. 1782, that his only edition was not fit to leave his chambers, but said: 'twenty years hence I shall probably have it in my power to give you an edition of the immortal bard.' 'Letters', I.63.

regard to the correctness of the text, be infinitely superior to any that has yet appeared. It will possess all the advantages of every former edition, and be as little liable, it is hoped, as possible to the defects of any.'

Coming as it did upon the heels of his cautious attack upon Johnson and Steevens, this announcement of a new edition appeared as a challenge to Shakespeare scholars, and it was natural that they should await its appearance with a great deal of interest. But had Ritson possessed the hardihood to publish at this time, he could not have met with success. When such a brilliant galaxy of commentators and editors as Johnson, Steevens, Tyrwhitt, Farmer, Reed, and Malone, possessed the ear of the book-sellers if not the confidence of the public, an edition of Shakespeare by the stern, uncompromising, minutely accurate, and pugnacious Ritson would have met with scant approval and perhaps with open rejection, entailing a heavy pecuniary burden upon its author. Ritson sensed the situation accurately. On Feb. 1, 1788, in the Preface to 'Quin Modest' he replied to the enquiries that had been made concerning his edition: 'In truth, the attention requisite to the publication of so voluminous a work, and the little likelihood there is of its being productive to the undertaker of any thing but trouble and expense, together with other causes of less consequence, have hitherto deterred me from putting it to press. But I have neither laid aside all thoughts of bringing it forward, nor can I pledge myself to produce it in any given time. I have little reason to suppose that the Public interests itself at all in the matter,

and therefore think myself at full liberty to suit my own inclination and convenience.'

He seems to have made a little extra effort following this, for later in the same year two sheets of the 'Comedy of Errors' were printed. They comprise the sole part of his 'Shakspeare' that ever saw the light. The matter rested here, although it is certain that he did not for some years give up his notion of eventually perfecting his edition, and perhaps never entirely relinquished it. To the indifference of the public, which he felt keenly, was soon added physical illness which materially lessened the amount of his literary work. In the middle of the year 1790 he wrote to J.C.Walker: 'I know not whether I shall ever have resolution enough to put an edition of this favorite author into the press, as the public will for some time be completely glutted with editions of one kind or another.'¹⁾ Two years later he was still gathering material and declared he had yet 'some intention of printing an edition of Shakspeare.'²⁾

Indeed, he was, throughout life, making notes, exchanging suggestions with friends, and amassing material for his edition of the dramatist. He carefully annotated his copy of the Johnson and Steevens' 'Shakspeare',³⁾ and of Steevens' 'Shakspeare's

1. 'Letters', I.168.

2. Ritson to Harrison, May 24, 1792, 'Letters', I.215.

3. See Leigh and Sotheby's Catalogue for Dec. 5, 1803, Lot 986: 'Shakspeare, by Johnson and Steevens, 8 vol. containing a great number of MS. notes, corrections, etc., together with 3 vols. of MS. notes by Mr. Ritson, prepared by him for the press, intending to publish it.' Longman purchased this lot 'for the trade', but it was disposed of at his sale in 1842. Since then I have been able to find no trace of it. Inquiries in 'Notes and Queries', 'The

twenty plays', 1) made innumerable notes and emendations 'on separate papers', and even collected and arranged for the press three volumes of manuscript material. Such is the irony of fate that, with a minor exception, 2) all this material, representing a life time of labor, has disappeared from view. Had Ritson published his edition there is no reason to doubt that it would have been accurate beyond anything that appeared in his day and would have secured for him a high place among the known and respected illustrators of Shakespeare. Unless the lost manuscripts are by good fortune discovered Ritson's fame as a Shakespeare commentator must rest upon the 'Remarks', 'Quin Modest', and 'Cursory Criticisms'. Making due allowance for an unhappy manner, this reputation is by no means unenviable.

Nation', and 'The Dial' have brought no response.

There is an interesting question as to why Longman did not publish this MS. Haslewood waxed indignant at what he calls the 'singular anathy or inconsistency of the bibliographical monopolizers', and conceives that a conspiracy to defame Ritson existed even after his death. But the publishers probably acted on purely commercial considerations.

1. Ibid. Lot 759: 'Shakspeare's 29 plays, printed in quarto during his life, by Steevens. 4 vols. MS. notes by Mr. Ritson on separate papers.' This, too, cannot now be located.

2. The only Ritson notes on Shakespeare that are known to exist today are in an autograph MS. of 23 pages: 'Notes on Shakespeare, and Various Readings', now in the possession of Mr. Perry. This was Lot 677 from the Hibbard Library, sold in 1902.

CHAPTER V.

Editorial Labors, 1783-1795,

Besides his first Shakespeare pamphlet, Ritson published in 1783, a three volume collection of 'English Songs, with their original airs, and a Historical Essay on the Origin and Progress of National Song.'¹⁾ Typographically the work is elegant. There is an excellent frontispiece by the Swiss artist Fuseli;²⁾ and scattered throughout the volumes are several delightful vignettes by Stothard.³⁾ Ritson was exceedingly vain of the mechanical appearance of his publications, and prided himself on their typographical finish almost as much as on their critical accuracy. He wrote to a friend that his books were 'not without some merit as an example of the printer's art': and he was always pleased when the format of his works was praised. It never occurred to him that he might lose less money on his publications if he allowed the printer to bring them forth in a substantial but less elegant dress.

1. The second edition 'with additional songs and occasional notes; by Thos. Park, London, 1813. The critical essays in this and the succeeding publications are reserved for separate treatment in the next chapter. *but one*.

2. Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), Swiss painter, spent practically the whole of his life in England. He was a leading figure in London society. As an artist he had many things in common with Reynolds and Blake. His most noteworthy paintings are perhaps his Shakespeare and Milton productions. It was through his intimacy with Joseph Johnson, bookseller of St. Paul's Churchyard, that he designed the frontispiece for Ritson's 'English Songs'.

3. Thomas Stothard (1755-1834) is chiefly famous as a book-illustrator. His long friendship with Blake was terminated as a result of Cromek's clandestine dealings concerning the painting of the 'Canterbury Pilgrims'.

In the case of 'English Songs' the perfection of the printer's workmanship was quite in keeping with the editor's ideals in forming the collection. Ritson summarized his aims in the Preface, as follows: 'Entirely then, to remove every objection to which the subject is, at present, open; to exhibit all the most admired, and intrinsically excellent specimens of lyric poetry in the English language at one view; to promote real instructive entertainment; to satisfy the critical taste of the judicious; to indulge the nobler feelings of the pensive; and to afford innocent mirth to the gay; has been the complex object of the present publication.¹⁾

Ritson's objection to former collections of songs or selected poems was two-fold. The good was indiscriminately mingled with the bad, and the bad usually far outweighed the good. So that he ^{who} sought a pearl must be content to look for it in a sea of mud. The 'mud' to which Ritson was particularly averse consisted of licentious and vulgar poetry. From D'Urfey's famous and popular compilation ²⁾ down to his own day, he judged there had been a steady degeneracy in the morals of song collections. From this sweeping condemnation he excepts only the collection of Aiken,³⁾ who had anticipated by a decade his attempt to elevate

1. Preface, ii.

2. Thomas D'Urfey, 'Wit and Mirth, or Pills to Purge Melancholy', 6 vols. London, 1719-20.

3. John Aiken, 'Essays in Song-Writing: with a collection of such English Songs as are most eminent for poetical merit'. London, 1772. Second edition, with additions and corrections, London, 1774.

the tone of popular song collections. Indeed, Ritson is only speaking in more emphatic language, the words of Aiken's own preface.

The second fault which Ritson found with earlier collections was the illogical arrangement of the selections. In his own work he followed a classification, which, though somewhat elaborate, is manifestly superior even to that used by Aiken, his best predecessor. As classification presupposes definition, Ritson had to set himself rather strict, and sometimes arbitrary, limits as to the character of the pieces to be included in each of his four main groups. However, the arrangement in no sense defeats its own ends, but is decidedly advantageous.

The first and principal division, 'Love Songs', is subdivided into five classes, each with its characteristic theme. This part of the work is a veritable store-house of song. It comprises pieces from authors ranging in time from Marlowe and Raleigh to Dr. Johnson, and in poetic merit running the gamut from Barton Booth and Sir William Yonge to Shakespeare.

The second division consists of half a hundred pieces unfortunately designated 'Drinking Songs'. It was the excess of Bacchanalian verses, with their attendant licentiousness, freedom, and immorality, that had disgraced previous song collections in Ritson's eyes. In making his own selections he considered that he had performed a commendable service for his generation, for he had carefully excluded every piece that might give offense to the most refined. If Ritson erred here, it was in that his enthusiasm

for morality caused him to exclude some songs which should have been given. 'Throughout the whole of the first volume', he says, 'the utmost care, the most scrupulous anxiety has been shown, to exclude every composition, however celebrated, or however excellent, of which the slightest expression, or the most distant allusion could have tinged the cheek of Delicacy, or offended the purity of the chastest ear.'¹⁾

Into a third division, 'Miscellaneous Songs', are thrown all those pieces of poetic merit which a strict observance of his classification had excluded from the two foregoing sections. It includes a large number of the most delightful songs in the whole collection, but its range is restricted by the general limitations which Ritson had placed upon himself. Some of these strictures are well founded, while others are the result of a personal whim. As an instance of the latter, songs on Free-Masonry are excluded, being 'calculated rather to disgrace than embellish the collection.' It was likewise too much to say that all political songs should be tabooed because even the best of them were too 'ephemeral and partial to gain applause when their subjects are forgotten.'

Those who look in this collection for extracts from the vast manuscript stores with which Ritson was familiar, will be disappointed. He was obviously striving to make his work popular and had no desire to include in it any piece which might please the antiquary but not the 'man of taste.' While he professed ac-

acquaintance with a 'prodigious quantity' of unpublished lyric poetry, he confidently assured his readers that every piece before them had already appeared in print. 'The editor, he writes, 'could not, consistently with his respect for the public, obtrude upon them a single line, which had not been already stamped with their approbation, or on the merits of which they had not had an opportunity to decide.'¹⁾

In the first three divisions the word song is used in its usual limited and restricted meaning, but in a fourth part, devoted to 'all the best of our old tragic legends, and historical or heroic ballads', it is extended to include purely narrative compositions. Ritson seems to have been actuated by two distinct motives in adding these 'genuine effusions of the English muse, unadulterated with the sentimental refinements of Italy or France.' The first, was to render a distinctly national service by including in his collection the genuine ancient songs of the English, while he ignored the 'mushroom growth of comic operas' which the recent 'fashionable rage' for French and Italian music had caused to spring up in England. The second, was to expose the inaccuracy of Percy's editorial methods.

The text of each ballad which Ritson prints, is based on some old black letter copy collated with various others. In this work he had occasion to consult many of Percy's originals; 'but not one', he says, 'has, upon examination, been found to be

1. Ibid, xi.

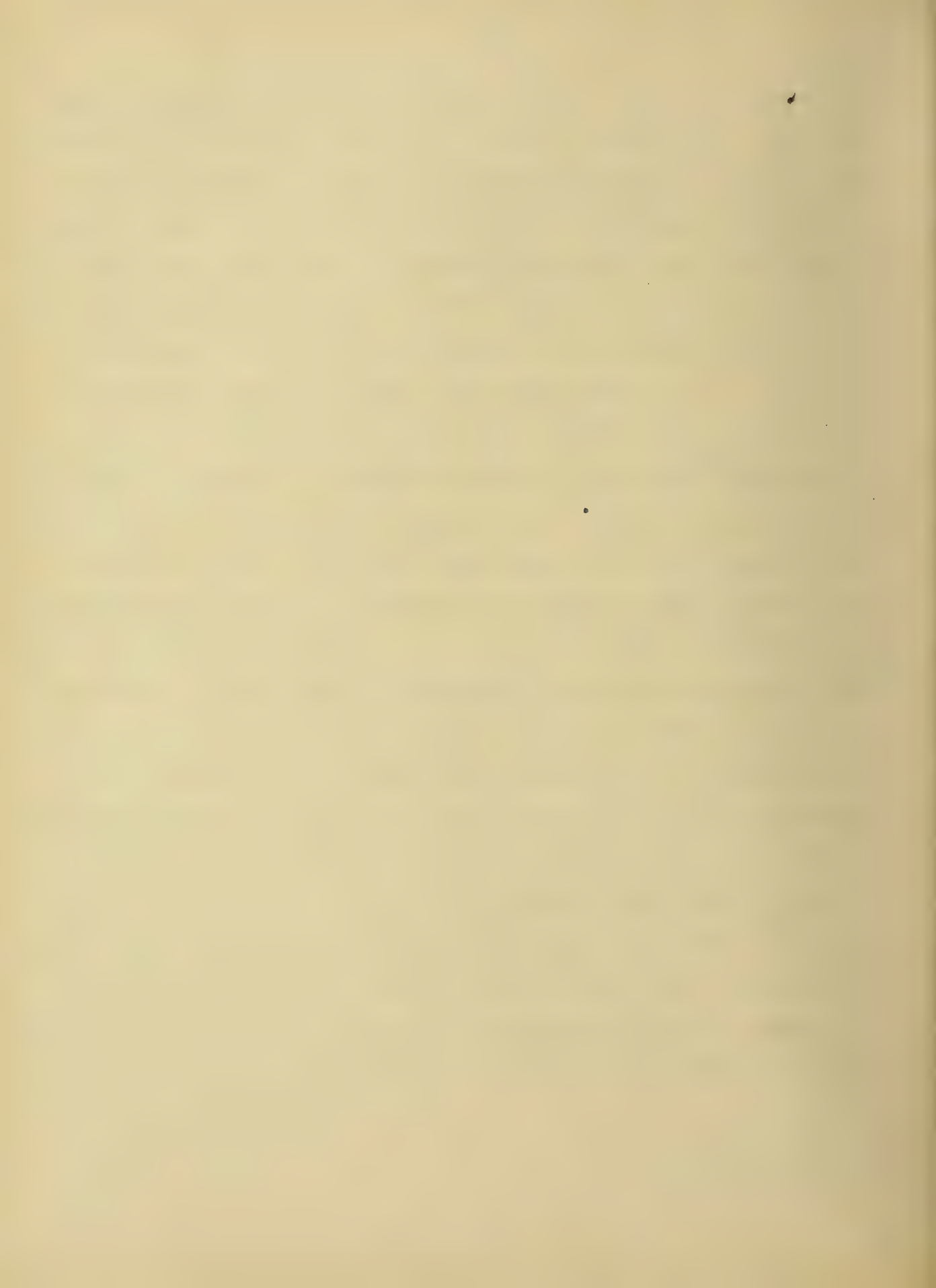
followed with either fidelity or correctness.' Although Ritson admitted the 'Reliques' to be a 'beautiful, elegant, and ingenious' work, yet his animosity to editorial laxity caused him to fall into heated condemnation of Percy. 'Forgery and imposition of every kind, ought to be universally execrated, and never more than when they are employed by persons high in rank or character, and those very circumstances are made use of to sanctify the deceit.'¹⁾

There are twenty-eight ballads in this section of 'English Songs'. Of this number fourteen had previously been printed by Percy; and of those in common, ten appear in Child's monumental collection. A comparison of the texts printed by Percy and Ritson, with those given by Child proves Ritson to be far superior to his celebrated contemporary in accuracy and fidelity to originals. Allowing, then, for a warmth of expression, which was perhaps not unnatural under the circumstances, we must acquiesce in Ritson's judgment, that 'the inaccurate and sophisticated manner in which every thing that had real pretensions to antiquity, has been printed' by Percy 'would be a sufficient apology for any one who might undertake to publish, more faithful, though, haply, less elegant copies.'²⁾

The third volume of Ritson's collection is taken up with the musical notation of the songs contained in the other two volumes. In this portion of the work the editor experienced considerable difficulty. By his own confession, Ritson's knowledge

1. Ibid, xiii n.

2. Ibid, xii.



of music was quite limited; but this handicap was largely overcome by the generous assistance of his friend William Shield, the famous musical composer, whose acquaintance he had made at Stockton. But even their combined ingenuity was unable to surmount some of the difficulties encountered. Into this part of the work Ritson carried his rigid canons of editorship. He insisted, first of all, upon the original air for each song. A large number of the old airs had, of course, been forgotten and were irrevocably lost. Of those that were known, many were faulty and had to be rearranged. In all cases there was the problem of harmonizing the words and music. Here it was Ritson's somewhat revolutionary demand that the music should be made to fit the words of the song, and not vice versa. Two composers who incurred Ritson's condemnation for the opposite practice were Dr. Arne,¹⁾ 'whose own professional excellence might have taught him the respect due that of another'; and William Jackson of Exeter,²⁾ 'who has gone so far as to prefix to one of his publications a formal defense of the freedom he has exercised upon the unfortunate bards who have fallen into his clutches.'³⁾ In his aversion to altering the original tunes, Ritson was fortunately supported by Shield, who wrote to him: 'I feel very differently from many of my brother professors, for

1. Thomas Augustine Arne (1710-1778), musical composer and teacher, supplied the music for Covent Garden and Drury Lane for many years. His two most notable triumphs are 'Rule Britannia', and 'Where the Bee Sucks'.

2. William Jackson, of Exeter, (1730-1803) was a musical composer, and author of numerous volumes of songs and many musical text books.

3. Preface, xvi.

although practise must improve my harmonical knowledge, it does not lessen the value of a simple national melody, which I hope will ever be admired by every sensible mind.'1)

Ritson deprecated the 'fashionable rage for music' which caused the people of his day to forsake the old songs and ancient ballads and turn to the ephemeral tunes of the second-rate play houses. In this he was seconding an earlier opinion of Dr. Aiken who characterized the tendency of the times in this wise: 'the most enchanting tunes are suited with the most flat and wretched combinations of words that ever disgraced the genius of a nation; and the miserable versifier only appears as the hired underling of a musical composer.'2) As an antidote to this 'popular' music Ritson advocated a return to the old songs whose simple melodies served only to enhance the sentiment of the words.3)

1. Benjamin Franklin, likewise, professed a greater admiration for the popular tunes of nature than for the productions of modern composers. After remarking that some country girl who has heard nothing but 'Chevy Chase' and 'The Children in the Woods', and has naturally a good ear, 'might more probably have made a pleasing popular tune than any of our masters here (London)', he adds of the modern composers: 'they are admirable at pleasing practised ears, and know how to delight one another; but, in composing for songs, the reigning taste seems to be quite out of nature, and yet like a torrent, hurries them all away with it: one or two perhaps only excepted.' (1769) 'The Writings of Benjamin Franklin'. ed. A.H. Smyth. 10 vols. 1906. V.529.

2. John Aiken, 'Essay on Song Writing', etc., Second edition, London, 1774. Preface, vi.

3. Ritson made no attempt to give any music further than a simple treble. Thomas Park, ('English Songs', second edition, Preface, xv n,) relates that he once heard a lady of high musical repute inquire of Ritson whether a bass had been printed with the airs of his English Songs? to which he replied 'a bass! what would you have a bass for? to spoil the treble?'

Ritson's careful study of the music of the old songs enabled him to name the original composers of many of the airs. Not only were they rescued from oblivion, but were given a pedigree as well. Besides ascribing to their composers more of the ancient tunes than any one had done before him, Ritson also put the authors' names to more of the songs than had appeared in any previous collection.

On the purely mechanical side, this part of the work presented difficulties. Musical printing did not develop as rapidly in England as on the continent, and at this time there was but one printer in the kingdom who possessed a sufficient quantity of musical type for this work, and those were all of equal size and character.¹⁾

Ritson's labor in compiling, and his expense in publishing 'English Songs' were largely rewarded in the unstinted praise given the collection by the Reviews.²⁾ Aside from a very natural objection to Ritson's harsh treatment of Percy, there was nothing but commendation for the editor and his publication. On all sides the hope was expressed that this work might meet with sufficient favor to encourage, not only Ritson, but other men as well, to bring out collections of ancient poetry in a manner pleasing both

1. As late as 1813, Park says it was necessary to cast the type twice for musical notes, and even the second font was quite defective in blending the ligatures of the notes. 'English Songs', Second edition, n. xvii n.

2. Critical Review, 53.300-4; Gentleman's Magazine, 54.ii., 817-8; 53.i., 223; Monthly Review, 73.234; British Critic, 42.153-9.

to the student and the man of taste. That the public was kindly disposed to works of this nature is amply attested by the large number of collections of songs, ballads, poems, romances, and the like, which came on the market in the next few years.

Ritson usually experienced more or less difficulty in the pecuniary matters relating to his books. His customary insistence on typographical elegance, and in the case of 'English Songs', the use of musical type, made publication very expensive. Ritson's carelessness in business dealings led often through misunderstandings to disrupted friendships. In this regard, 'English Songs' took its toll in the friendship of Christopher, Ritson's Stockton bookseller.¹⁾

But while the publication of a first edition might be productive of unpleasant consequences, Ritson seldom gave up working on a book when it had been issued from the press. Instead, he set about correcting and altering with an eye to a new edition. The suggestions of friends were always gratefully received, and he undoubtedly profited by hostile criticism, although he made any thing but grateful acknowledgment of it. He left corrected copy 'for a second edition' of many of his works, but only two of his publications²⁾ were reprinted during his life. In 1796 he was

1. See 'Letters', I. 111-113.

2. 'The Bishopric Garland', 1784, 1792, and 'The North-Country Chorister', 1792, 1802. Being simple garlands with no critical matter, a new edition required scarcely any labor on the part of the editor. Nevertheless Ritson strove for the minutest accuracy in all his publications, irrespective of their size.

considering a new edition of 'English Songs',¹⁾ but the press of other work caused him to delay it until too late.

It has already been stated that Ritson maintained through life an interest in his native district in the north of England, and especially in the antiquities of the region. One of the earliest evidences of his interest in its literary antiquities is his publication in 1784, of sixteen northern provincial ballads under the title, 'The Bishopric Garland; or Durham Minstrel: a choice Collection of Excellent Songs'. This collection, like others of similar title which followed, was of interest mainly to residents of Durham, and to provincial antiquaries. However, these little volumes possess greater significance for the student of eighteenth century popular poetry than they had for the men of their own day. They represent Ritson's most exhaustive, and practically his only successful, attempt to collate^{ect} songs from oral tradition. The majority of the pieces in these Garlands are here printed for the first time. Some of them are ascribed to an author, but of many more the composer is unknown. They are frequently avowedly modeled after some ancient ballad, and are often directed to be sung to a certain popular tune. Ritson's chief interest was in reprinting medieval poetry from neglected manuscripts, but he realized the value of preserving the songs of the

1. See 'Letters', II.109.

people then current in popular tradition and was not averse to printing such songs, even though they were merely of local concern and, frequently, of no great antiquity. The popular interest aroused by the 'Reliques' in poems of this sort was still eager. 'The Bishopric Garland', put up in the form and size commonly vended by itinerant hawkers, sold well and was twice reprinted.¹⁾ Ritson was not unmindful of the correctness and finish of even his smallest collections, and did not scruple to ask his friends for aid in perfecting this and similar volumes.²⁾

About this period was issued at Stockton, 'Sammer Gurton's Garland, or the Nursery Parnassus', an anthology of nursery rhymes.

A further collection of local northern garlands appeared in 1788³⁾ as 'The Yorkshire Garland: being a curious collection

1. At Newcastle, 1792, omitting six songs, but with two new ones added. A third edition, containing all eighteen songs, in 'Northern Garlands', 1810.

2. See 'Letters', I. 110.

3. In 1788 also appeared 'Homer's Hymn to Venus, translated from the Greek, with notes by J. Ritson.' Due, perhaps, to the similarity of the printed characters for capital I and J, this work was erroneously attributed by the Gentleman's Magazine, 59.539, to Joseph Ritson. In the obituary notice of Joseph Ritson in the same periodical, 73.ii. 987-8, this translation is listed among his works. The error, however, was detected by a correspondent who pointed out in a subsequent number that the 'Hymn' was translated by Isaac Ritson and not Joseph. The same mistake was made by Nichols in 'Literary Anecdotes', VIII. 135 n. and later corrected. The real translator was Isaac Ritson (1761-1789) a native of Penwith, Scotland, who supported himself in London by writing medical articles for the Monthly Review. Besides 'Homer's Hymn', he left in manuscript a translation of Hesiod's 'Theogony'. His abilities are commended by Brydges (Censura Literaria, V, 107) and Nichols (Literary Anecdotes, VIII. n. xii).

Joseph Ritson has left the following note in his own copy of

of old and new songs concerning that famous country'. The songs and ballads contained in these little volumes were mainly collected during the vacations which Ritson spent at Stockton and neighbouring towns. The task of gathering material usually extended over two or three years, and even then he found it necessary to importune friends for 'an additional song or two' to fill out the volume.

Ritson's correspondence during the years 1783 to 1790 reveals him a very busy man. In addition to frequent letters to his sister and nephew, and the constant intercourse with Rowntree and Wadeson concerning professional affairs,¹⁾ he wrote often to Robert Harrison ²⁾ and Joseph Cooper Walker ³⁾ on literary matters. With Harrison his correspondence was chiefly concerning difficult etymologies. Harrison lent a fund with Ritson for the purchase of rare books of linguistic interest, and the critic drove many a shrewd bargain for his friend.

Isaac's translation: 'This Isaac Ritson, a lame man, who walked with a crutch, was, for sometime schoolmaster at Penrith; but ambition having induce'd him to study physick, and adopting the principles and practise of Doctor Thomas Brown, he addicted himself so much to that worthy physician's universal specific - a glass of brandy, that he fel sick, went mad, and dye'd in the neighbourhood of London. Poor Isaac! thou should's't have remember'd the fate of Old Cole's dog, which was determine'd to take the wall of a waggon, and was crushed to death for his presumption. J.R.' Haslewood, p. 14 n.

1. See Chapter II.

2. Robert Harrison (1715-1802) was a mathematician and linguist of Newcastle. He was generally known as Philosopher Harrison, and was said to be acquainted with almost every known language.

3. Joseph Cooper Walker (1761-1810) made extensive researches in Italian literature and Irish antiquities and published many valuable works in these fields.

Ritson's point of contact with Walker was Irish antiquities. He was for a time engaged upon a collection of Irish Songs but assured Walker that he would not undertake to publish it. 'It would be the extreme of arrogance in me to attempt a work for which no one can be less qualified. All that I could possibly pretend to do would be only to put down in a book all the pieces of that description I could meet with.'¹) He urged Walker to perform this service for his country, knowing that the work would receive at his hands the scholarly attention which it required.

Each summer from 1786 to 1790, Ritson spent his vacation in the north of England, going at times into Scotland, and once taking in Dublin on his way north. He used these visits as opportunities to carry on his researches into the antiquities of Durham, to investigate the manuscript collections of the various local libraries, and to collect Scottish Songs. In June 1790, he mentions, for the first time, a nervous affection which has become so distressing as to interfere seriously with his work. 'Anything beyond a mere letter of business is attended with so much trouble and difficulty as to make me eagerly lay hold of any trifling pretext to put it off till the next day.'²) He was recommended to take an extended excursion into the country, but not finding opportunity for this, his malady grew steadily worse.

1. 'Letters', I.151.

2. Ibid, I.162.

Percy's 'Reliques' was the signal for a reawakening of interest in poetry both ancient and modern. After the appearance and enthusiastic reception of that epoch-making book there came an almost steady stream of collections of songs and ballads, editions of the poets, both separate and collected, and researches into the ancient literature of the English and neighboring peoples.

1) Ritson's first important contribution to this stream was his 'English Songs'. After it came the little collections of garlands which were primarily of local interest, but whose popularity was undoubtedly enhanced by the increasing general interest in works of this character. Nearly a decade after 'English Songs', appeared Ritson's second valuable addition to the rising stream of poetry collections. As early as 1787 'Ancient Songs, from the time of King Henry III. to the Revolution', 2) was printed, but its publication was unaccountably delayed until 1792, at which time it appeared bearing on its title page the date of 1790.

1. A partial list follows: Herd, 'Ancient and Modern Songs', 1769; Bannatyne, 'Ancient Scottish Poems', 1770; Percy, 'Northern Antiquities', 1770; Aikin, 'Essays on Song-Writing', 1772; Warton, 'History of English Poetry', 1774-81; Adamson, 'Muses Threnodie', 1774; Bell, 'English Poets', 1776-87; Evans, 'Old Ballads', 1777; Johnson, 'English Poets', 1779; Pinkerton, 'Scottish Tragic Ballads', 1781; Caw, 'The Poetical Museum', 1784; Walker, 'Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards', 1786; Johnson, 'Scots Musical Museum', 1787-1803; Ellis, 'Specimens of the Early English Poets', 1790.

2. References are to second edition, 'Ancient Songs and Ballads, from the Reign of Henry II. to the Revolution', 2 vol. London, 1829. Third edition revised by W.C. Hazlitt, London, 1877. There are two historical and critical essays prefixed to this work, both of which are treated in a succeeding chapter: 1. 'Observations on the ancient English minstrels'. 2. 'Dissertation on the songs, music, and vocal and instrumental performances of the ancient English.'



In point of typographical elegance 'Ancient Songs' is scarcely inferior to its predecessor 'English Songs'. It is supplied with a number of vignettes by Stobthard, which are valuable curiosities. But the editor's object was slightly different from that in the earlier collection. In that work he confined himself to songs that were acknowledged favorites and endeavored to give simply a chaste and well arranged collection of them. In this, he enters a less frequent^{ed} field, and endeavors, by means of selections of poetry and song, to give a view of a period of ancient history - to reveal the habits, customs, and manners of the people of that time. And yet, even here he ventures to hope for a portion of popular favor, and in his preface appeals to the kindly reception by the public of similar compilations, as an apology for this one. 'The favorable attention which the public has constantly shown to works illustrating the history, poetry, language, manners, or amusements of their ancestors, and particularly to such as have professed to give any of the remains of their lyric compositions, has induced the editor to communicate a small but genuine collection of Ancient Songs and Ballads, which his attachment to the subject had occasionally led him to form.'

There was one error of judgment on the editor's part which militated against the popularity of this work. Ritson's veneration for the relics of antiquity, and his desire to transmit the songs exactly as he found them, induced him to print the earliest pieces with Anglo-Saxon characters, and even the later ones with their obsolete spelling. He soon came to feel that

such scrupulous fidelity to the mechanical form of his originals was not demanded by the most rigid canons of editorship; and he saw immediately that the sale of his work was impeded by the antique air which these innovations gave to it. In preparing the manuscript for a new edition ¹⁾ he discarded both these disguises, and with it his work lost much of its forbidding aspect.

Ritson's native field of labor was the Middle Ages, and he did his best work in the ancient periods. As distinguished from most of his other publications, 'English Songs' is concerned with modern poetry. But in 'Ancient Songs', Ritson was decidedly in his true element. In this work his editorial virtues are shown to highest advantage: antiquarian erudition, elaborate research, indefatigable care, and faithfulness of transcript appear on every hand. Ritson was more veracious than Percy and more industrious than Warton; and he only fell short of the erudition of Tyrwhitt. To combine these elements with advanced standards of editorship was as unusual in the eighteenth century as it was fortunate for the next. Subsequent researches have revealed few errors in Ritson's editing, and such as have come to light were due to the limitations under which every literary pioneer labors.

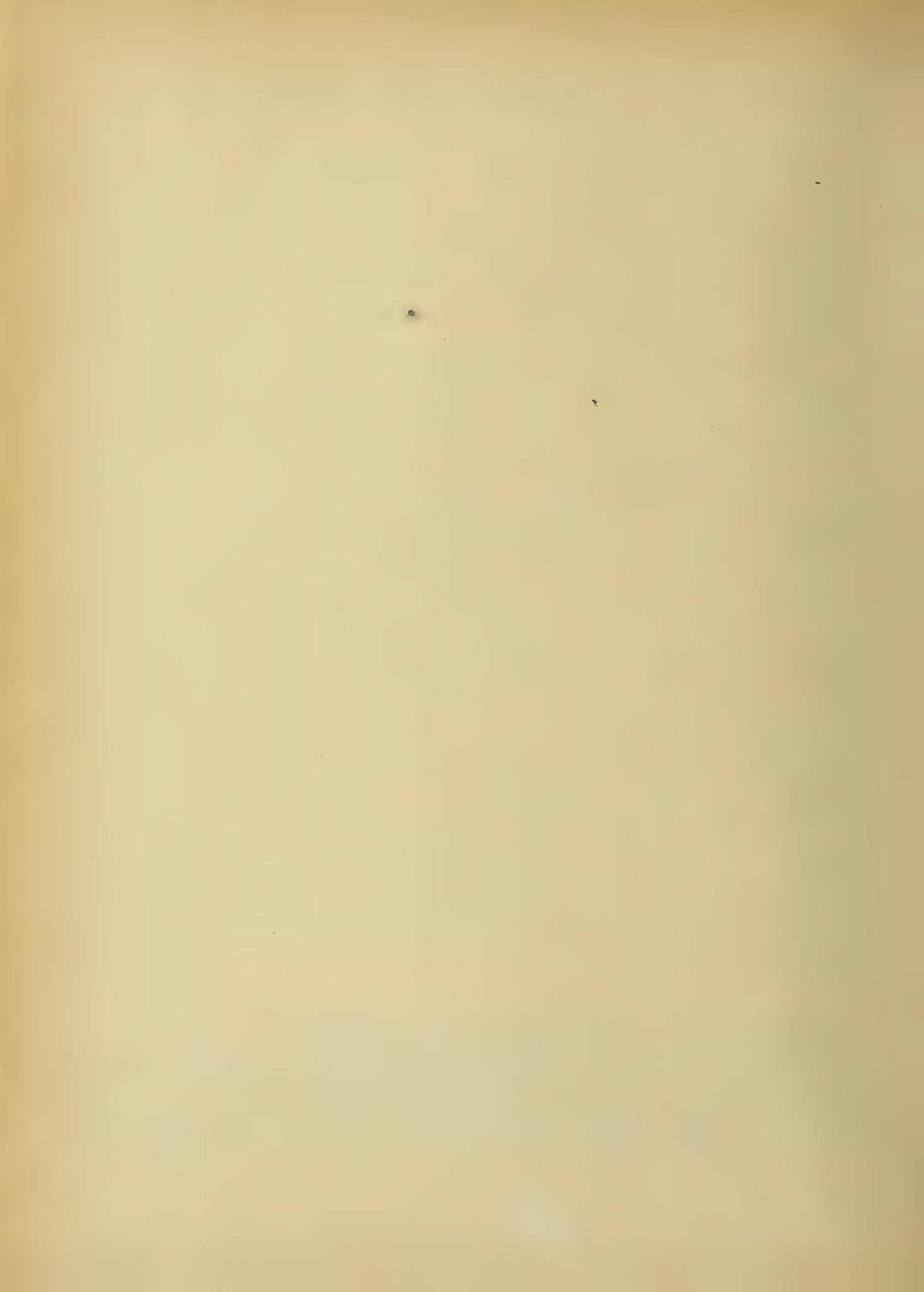
1. Thomas Park is in error when he says ('English Songs', 1813. I.xc n. and II.390 n.) that the manuscript for the new edition of 'Ancient Songs' was 'totally destroyed at the morbid close of Ritson's life.' The two volume manuscript in Ritson's hand, now in the possession of Mr. Perry, was used as the basis of the second edition in 1829.

As the title page indicates, 'Ancient Songs' covers the period from the reign of Henry III 1) to the Revolution. Through its 108 songs and ballads the editor hopes to illustrate national history, and to show to the world the idealized manners and splendid traditions of the past. In general, the arrangement of the songs follows that of the 'Reliques', although the different 'Classes' have here more strict chronological limitations. This plan was later adopted by Ellis and Southey in their 'Specimens'. 2)

Intrinsically the songs are of varying degrees of merit. There are genuine old ballads like 'Fair Margaret and Sweet William', and delightful lyrics like 'Sumer is acumen in'. But there are a few pieces, such as 'A ditty upon the uncertainty of this life', which have little merit to atone for their obscurity. Indeed, Ritson was a better judge of the antiquity of a poem than of its literary merit. But it may be argued in his favor that in this collection he was concerned primarily with the pieces as antiquities and not as literary gems. In 'English Songs' he boasted of the care he had exercised in selecting the pieces offered to the public; but in this work he seemed not to feel the need for selection, and so printed every ancient piece which fell within the period.

1. The second edition includes that of Henry II.

2. George Ellis, 'Specimens of the Early English Poets', 1790; Robert Southey, 'Specimens of the later English Poets', 1807. Thomas Park is clearly in error in asserting ('English Songs', 1813, p. xcv) that Ritson meant to conform his 'Ancient Songs' to the 'Specimens' of Ellis, 'in the hope of obtaining for them (it) poetic popularity'. Ritson's work was printed three years before that of Ellis appeared.



If Ritson avoided manuscript material in preparing 'English Songs', he almost equally avoided printed sources in the present collection. Here are many old songs and poems rescued from the oblivion of the Harleian, Cotton, Bodleian and other manuscript collections, and for the first time appearing in print. Ritson transcribed practically all the material himself, but in translating the Latin 'Drinking Ode' of Walter Mapes, and the French ballads 'On King Richard I.', 'On the death of Simon de Montfort', and 'The Recollections of Chatelain',¹⁾ he had the assistance of friends. A few pieces that had been printed in earlier editions were included here in order to make the collection as complete as possible. There was, in some instances, however, a secondary motive: to point out the errors of former editors and to give for the first time a correct version.²⁾

The Glossary of the first edition was, according to the Monthly Review,³⁾ 'a very moderate performance, and betrays an unskilfulness in the language of the Anglo-Saxons which ill becomes the editor of compositions written under Henry III.' The study of Anglo-Saxon was at this time in its infancy, and 'Ancient Songs'

1. The translation of 'Simon de Montfort' in 'Ancient Songs' was made by George Ellis 'at Ritson's request.' A translation of the same ballad, made by Sir Walter Scott, also 'at Ritson's request', was intended for a new edition of 'Ancient Songs', but Scott permitted Park to include it in the second edition of 'English Songs'. 1813. II.380 ff.

2. On the failure of Ritson's nephew to make a satisfactory version of 'The Recollections of Chatelain' (See 'Letters', II.231), he asked Scott to undertake the translation. It appears only in the second edition.

2. See 'Captain Car', II.38 ff.

3. Monthly Review, 91.181.

was Ritson's first extended attempt to edit any of the early poetry. He, perhaps better than any one else, appreciated the faults of his first glossary, for in the second edition it is doubled in length and many of the original entries are altered. Ritson's later fame as a glossographer was too wide spread to allow much weight to an anonymous charge of unskilfulness.

Ritson's editorial success with 'Ancient Songs' was generally praised. The Reviewers saw in this and similar works, not simply a production for the amusement of the antiquary, but a source of inspiration for the poet and the historian. In the multiplication of books of this nature 'our future poets would have a storehouse of received fictions to which they might resort' without danger of offending by 'dissonance from tradition'.¹⁾

Ritson continued his researches in the poetry of antiquity, and perpetuated his fame as an accurate and conscientious editor, by the publication, in 1791, of 'Pieces of Ancient Popular Poetry; from authentic manuscripts, and old printed copies.'²⁾ This volume, like its forerunners exhibits a high grade of typ-

1. Monthly Review, 91.178-82. An article in Fraser's Magazine, Dec. 1833, makes wholesale condemnation of Ritson's works. With regard to 'Ancient Songs' there is a curious inconsistency which shows the shifts to which the Reviewer is put to avoid giving any praise to Ritson. In the first place he ridicules the affectation of quaintness which caused Ritson to print his poems with Anglo-Saxon characters, whereas these have been discarded in the second edition, which he is admittedly reviewing. He then turns to the book at his elbow to lament the lack of illustrations to make the pieces 'grateful either to the eye or taste', but the first edition was plentifully supplied with charming vignettes. An undivided attention to either edition of the book would destroy one or other of his objections.

2. Second edition by Frank, 1833, adds Ritson's own notes and the ballad of 'Sir Percy' with notes by Frank.

ranhy. The fifteen woodcuts, by Thomas and John Bewick,¹⁾ which illustrate the poems, are among the most pleasing of all those that adorn Ritson's publications. The collection is small, consisting of seven poems with a brief introduction: a glossary: and a very ingenious preface.

Although popular interest in old poetry was on the increase, yet Ritson felt it still necessary to apologize for these old compositions, 'which will have few charms in the critical eye of a cultivated age'. 'The genius which has been successfully exerted in contributing to the instruction or amusement of society in even the rudest times', he says, 'is a superannuated domestic whose passed services entitle his old age to a comfortable provision and retreat; or rather, indeed, a humble friend, whose attachments in adverse circumstances demands the warm and grateful acknowledgments of prosperity.'²⁾

It was to the humble beginnings of these 'nameless bards' of antiquity that Ritson thought posterity was indebted for a Homer and a Chaucer. And this was ample reason for preserving carefully every genuine ancient relique which could be discovered. The poems in his collection he attributed to the minstrels - men 'who made it their profession to chant or rehearse them up and down the country in the trophied hall or before the gloomy castle,

1. To Thomas Bewick (1753-1828) is ascribed the restoration of wood engraving as an art in England. John Bewick (1760-95) is less noted as an engraver than his elder brother.

2. Preface. v.

and at marriages, wakes, and other festive meetings, and who generally accompanied their strains, by no means ruder than the age itself, with the tinkling of a harp, or sometimes, it is apprehended with the graces of a much humbler instrument.'¹⁾

Ritson intended this little volume to be suggestive. He was himself engaged in collecting ancient material for future publication, and expressed the hope that others might be inspired to undertake similar tasks. In addition to publishing many volumes of antiquarian interest, he rendered a distinct service to the study of ~~ancient~~ ^{medieval} poetry by constantly reminding his generation of the richness of the unworked mine of antiquity. He lost no opportunity to stimulate research after the scarcely known, but excellent, old songs which he described as abounding 'with a harmony, spirit, keenness, and natural humor, little to be expected, perhaps, in compositions of so remote a period.'

'Ancient Popular Poetry' was presented to the world with a degree of candor and fidelity as remarkable as it was little to be experienced in similar publications of the period. What, with the forgeries of Chatterton, Macpherson, Evans, and Pinkerton, and the surreptitious additions and clandestine alterations of Percy, it was deserving of no small honor to print from known and designated authorities, and to notice in the margin every variation from the original which a disuse of contractions and a systemat-

1. Ibid, vii-viii.

ization of punctuation rendered necessary. This was Ritson's method. As an example of its successful application, he submitted 'Ancient Popular Poetry' 'to the patronage of the liberal and the candid, of those whom the artificial refinements of modern taste have not rendered totally insensible to the humble effusions of unpolished nature, and the simplicity of old times.'¹⁾

In Ritson's own judgment the Reviewers' were by no means to be classed as 'liberal and candid' beings. Yet one of those individuals whom he considered his inveterate enemies, praised this publication as a valuable work in the meretorious service of rescuing from the hand of oblivion what in remote periods, obtained popularity and praise from its comparative excellence.²⁾

The short introductions to the various selections are devoted mainly to a history of the poem which follows, and to an account of the editor's source. 'Adam Bel' is given from Copland's black letter copy, but there is nothing in the introduction or notes to indicate that it was republished for the 'insignificant purpose of immortalizing the true readings' of that editor in

1. Ibid, xiii.

2. Gentleman's Magazine, 61.561 ff. For another commendatory notice see Monthly Review, 92.73-7. The writer in Fraser's Magazine, to whom reference has already been made, condemns this, as he does all Ritson's work. There is not the slightest basis in fact, for his assertion that 'several of the pieces were published originally with the purpose only of gratifying Ritson's malevolence'. This volume came to a second edition in 1833, and a third in 1824, but the Reviewer gives it as his 'sincere opinion' that 'Ritson never wrote or compiled anything worthy of a reprint.' His peevish chiding at the public for admiring books which he had told them to despise, makes him a ridiculous figure.

preference to Percy's.¹⁾ Surely the editor may be allowed to disagree with two of the Bishop's etymologies without being stigmatized as envious. The antiquity and popularity of the piece were sufficient recommendation for its insertion.

'The King and the Barker' is the un doubted original of Percy's 'King Edward IV', and a Tanner of Tannwerth.' To this piece in the second edition, Frank adds the following self-explanatory note: 'Mr. Ritson intended, in any future edition, to have suppressed this piece, which was originally printed chiefly with a view to bringing to light some more accurate copy: an effect which has not been, nor is now likely to be, produced. The present editor, however, is tempted to preserve it, as a singular curiosity, notwithstanding the excessive and irremediable corruption of the manuscripts.'

If it were necessary to make a choice, 'The Life and Death of Tom Thumbe' would probably be designated the most attractive communication in the book. The ballad itself is a most delightful account of the marvelous exploits of this doughty hero of childhood. In the Introduction Ritson gives extracts from the early writers who mention Tom Thumb, but he is unable to trace the character farther back than the sixteenth century.

Besides the three pieces already mentioned the volume contains 'The Friere and the Boy', evidently of French extraction: 'How a Merchande dyd hys wyfe Betray'; the little moral niece,

1. Monthly Review, 92.73.

'How the Wise Man taught his Son'; and 'The Lovers' Quarrel'. To these was added 'Sir Penny' in the second edition.

In 1792 Ritson took up again the series of poetical garlands which had been interrupted four years earlier. He now published 'The North Country Chorister; an unparalleled variety of excellent songs, collected and published together, for general amusement, by a Bishopric ballad singer.'¹⁾

The fifth and last of these little books appeared the following year with the title page, 'The Northumberland Garland: or, Newcastle Nithingale: a matchless collection of famous songs.'

2) This collection consists of sixteen northern songs of greater or less antiquity, the most ancient being some 400 years old. In the preparation of this work Ritson called upon his friends, especially Harrison, for assistance in collecting songs, as well as for judgment on the engraving of the Bishopric arms. His nephew, at this time a resident of Stockton, rendered valuable assistance in completing and perfecting all the Garlands.

In the Gentleman's Magazine for June, 1811, appeared an 'Ode to Mr. Ritson, on his intended descriptive revision of the ancient ballad of 'Chevy Chase', (written near the spot,) in 1791.' An explanatory note says: 'the purpose Mr. Ritson once entertained of publishing the above ballad with historical and topographical observations, was revoked soon after a visit he made to the north, one of the objects of which was to collect materials.' Ritson did, however, print the ballad of 'The Hunting of the Cheviat' from MS. Ashmole, 48, Bodleian Library, as Song II. in 'Northumberland

1. Second edition, 1802, reprinted in 'Northern Garlands', 1810.
2. Reprinted in 'Northern Garlands', 1810.

'Garlands', where it appeared without introduction or notes.¹⁾ That this copy does not fulfil the description given in the 'Ode' is readily apparent. It is evident that Ritson had designed some more thorough and elaborate treatment of the subject; and the author of the 'Ode' speaks enthusiastically of the old border song and of the antiquarian learning and superior abilities of Ritson. It is to be regretted that Ritson abandoned his original design. I quote three stanzas from the 'Ode':

4. Wert thou, discerning Ritson, near,
Thou wouldst the awful scene revere:
A scene made sacred by those rhymes,
Which thou may'st deck for latest times.
5. Thy fancy, from her store, would yield
A thousand shades to throng the field:-
And sounds create of trampling steed,
Or arrow, wing'd with deathful speed.
12. Much to the Witred Sage (Percy) is due:
Ritson, the liberal task pursue ---
And Chevy Chase, the pride of you,
With all its feudal spoils, restore.

According to his contract with the printers, Ritson was to receive 100 copies of the 'Northumberland Garland'. Although the work came out in 1793, ^{he} ~~Ritson~~ had not received a single copy by August 15, 1796.²⁾ By this time both the publishers, Hall and Elliot, were dead, and the administrators silently ignored Ritson's letters. In desperation he appealed to his ever-helpful friend Harrison to collect what copies of the book he could lay his

1. Child unaccountably overlooked this publication of the A version, which antedates by three quarters of a century the copy in Skeat's 'Specimens' (1873) which he considers to be its earliest appearance in print. See 'English and Scottish Popular Ballads', (No. 162) III, 303-15.

2. 'Letters', II, 129.

hand on, and to use every effort to recover the block so that a 'new and improved' edition might be produced. Harrison succeeding in finding the block ^{and} sent it to Ritson together with a few copies of the work, many of them sadly mutilated.

These garlands, without glossary, and lacking critical apparatus (except the few notes necessary to show textual variations and put up in the style of the penny-histories, met with a ready sale and soon became quite scarce. Ritson is reported to have said that these books sold better than any other of his various publications.¹⁾ He projected new editions of all of them but was prevented from carrying out his design save in the two instances already cited.²⁾

In 1793, Ritson began the publication of an 'English Anthology', designed to contain the best productions of all the modern poets from Surrey to his own day, and completed it, in three volumes, the following year. Stothard supplied a number of engravings, and the volumes were printed with Ritson's usual elegance. The accuracy of the text is likewise noteworthy. The editor's statement that no publication of a like nature ever was printed with superior fidelity and correctness, is scarce an

1. See 'English Songs', 1813, p. xciv.

2. This task was completed in 1810, when a volume of 'Northern Garlands', containing 'The Bishopric Garland', 'The Yorkshire Garland', 'The Northumberland Garland', and 'The North-Country Chorister', each with a separate title page dated 1809, made its appearance. Of this collection only 500 copies were printed and it is today very rare.

exaggeration. So carefully faithful was he to the best sources of all his material that not above two or three errors have been noticed in the text of the whole work.

Ritson declared his plan to be a chronological arrangement of selections of poetry 'from the beginning of the fifteenth century (or, including an extract from Chaucer, from the latter part of the fourteenth) to the present time.' The work as a whole does not, however, follow this plan. It is divided into four parts, in each of which the selections follow the chronological order, with a fifth part devoted to living writers. So confusing is this plan that without the 'Index of Authors' one would be at a loss to find any particular selection. The first volume begins with Wyatt, the second with Dyer, the third with Chaucer. The plan leads to such absurdities as the placing of Mason's 'Isis' at volume III., page 262, and Warton's 'Triumph of Isis', which is an answer to it, at volume II., page 136. Within the different 'Parts' each a unit in itself, Ritson bases his chronology on the date of the author's birth. Because he did not know their dates, he omitted from the first volume, Harrington, Duke, Garth, Fenton, Brome, and Somerville.¹) But it is the date of an author's poem, and not of his life or death, that should be of supreme importance in a collection of poetry.

1. By an appeal to the public he was furnished the dates of these men in time to insert all of them in the second volume. A sufficient test of his 'Chronological' plan!

Although Ritson placed great emphasis upon the 'elegance' and 'correctness' of the 'Anthology', he was none too sanguine of its success. The following cynical and ill-natured extract from the Advertisement gives his estimate of the public taste in matters of poetry, and shows that the attacks of the Reviewers still rankled in his mind. 'The editor is sufficiently familiar with the poetical productions of preceding centuries to pronounce with confidence, that no composition of a moderate length is to be found, prior to the year 1500, which would be thought to deserve a place in these volumes; the nicety of the present age being ill disposed to make the necessary allowances for the uncouth diction and homely sentiments of former times. Nor will any person be found to rescue such things from oblivion, while the attempt exposes him to the malignant and ruffian-like attacks of some hackney scribbler or personal enemy, through the medium of one or other of two periodical publications, in which the most illiberal abuse is vented under colour of impartial criticism, and both the literary and moral character of every man who wishes to make his peculiar studies contribute to the information or amusement of society are at the mercy of a conceited pedant, or dark and cowardly assassin. The editor, at the same time, by no means, flatters himself, that either the omission of what is obscure and unintelligible, or the insertion of every thing elegant and refined, will be sufficient to protect these volumes from the rancorous malice and envenomed

slander of the reviewing critic.' 1) He appeals, however, from the partial censures of a mercenary and malevolent individual, to the judgment and candour of a generous and discerning public, whose approbation is proposed as the sole reward of his disinterested labours.' 2)

The 'English Anthology' received little favorable contemporary mention. It seems to have been generally felt that the compilation filled no particular need, and was indispensable to neither the student of poetry nor the general reader. To include in a collection of this sort long extracts from Dryden, Milton, Pope, and such other authors as one's library is already supplied with, was in Ritson's day considered unnecessary. The Reviewers 3) suggested alternative plans by following which, they declared, valuable and needed works could be produced. Such were: a chronological series of all the best poetry from the minor writers:

1. The attack under which Ritson was smarting began with the publications of his 'Observations' on Warton, (Chapter III.) and increased with his Shakespeare criticisms, (Chapter IV.) and his attacks on Percy and Pinkerton (Chapter VII.). While no severe and few unfavorable, reviews have been noticed in the present chapter, it should be borne in mind that we are here dealing only with Ritson's editorial labors. The attitude of the Reviewers to his Historical Essays is altogether another story. Ritson himself failed to distinguish between the commendation of his editorial abilities and the condemnation of his controversial asperity: or if he made the distinction, he considered the praise as mere sop.

2. Advertisement, pp.v-vi.

3. See British Critic, I.95-7; Critical Review, 10.196-9; 12.412-13; Monthly Review, 96.215; 98.229-30. The British Critic stands alone in praising the 'taste and acuteness of the editor.'

a series of English poetry with critical remarks on its progress and development; a collection of all the English translations from the Classics. But to make such a collection as Ritson's was only to 'add one more to the list of books.' In this judgment the early critics appear to be supported by the verdict of later years, for no second edition of the 'Anthology' has been issued.

In the 'Essay on National Song', prefixed to Ritson's collection of 'English Songs', 1783, there is no mention of the part played by Scottish poetry in the development of national song. The editor explains that this omission was not unintentional, as 'an accurate investigation and ample discussion of this curious and important subject is intended for a future opportunity.'¹) However, it was not until 1794 that Ritson's collection of 'Scotish Songs'²) appeared. The verses are accompanied by the genuine music, wherever the combined ingenuity and labor of Shield and Ritson was able to discover it, and the volumes are illustrated by engravings of Stothard. During the decade between its first mention and its final completion, 'Scotish Songs' had been continually before Ritson's mind. In the preface to the printed work he bears witness to the labor which its compilation had incurred. 'This', he says, 'is by no means one of those crude and hasty publications of which

1. 'English Songs', 1813. I.xciii.

2. 'Scotish Songs', 2 vols., London, 1794. A prefatory 'Historical Essay' furnishes an extended treatment of the development of song in Scotland. It is discussed in a following chapter.

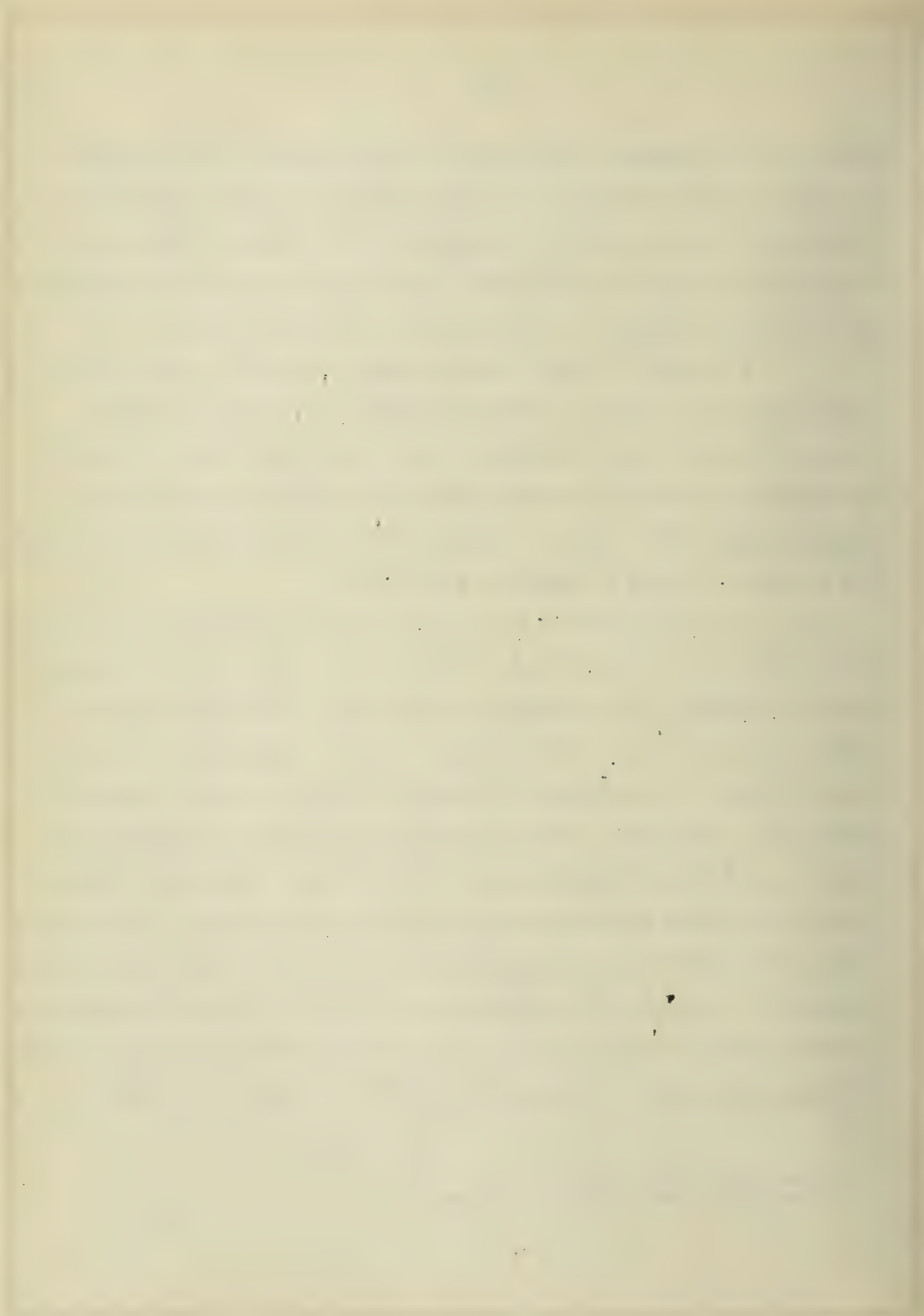
there are too frequent instances; it has received the occasional attention of many years, and no opportunity has been neglected of rendering it more worthy of approbation; the editor having even made repeated visits to different parts of Scotland for the purpose of obtaining materials or information upon the subject.'

A perusal of his correspondence during the years preceding the publication of 'Scotish Songs', affords an intimate view of Ritson in the workshop. He collected material at every opportunity, carefully authenticated each song and proved the genuineness[/]of every scrap of music, and saw the sheets drag through the press with untold vexations and delays.

It is impossible to say when Ritson's interest in Scottish history and poetry began. Reared, as he was, in the extreme north of England, the influence of Scottish tradition must have been felt very early. On his first visit to Edinburgh, at the age of twenty, he purchased a volume of Scottish poems and several Histories,¹⁾ and from that time on seemed equally interested in Scottish and English antiquities. From London his annual vacation tours to Stockton often carried him over into Scotland. Especially from 1786 to 1790 was he concerned with the history of the northern kingdom.²⁾ Besides the information gathered on his own expeditions into the north, Ritson acquired some valuable material from friends more advantageously situated than himself. These men he kept

1. See ante, n.16 n.

2. See 'Letters', I.105-182, passim.



constantly informed of his discoveries and of his general progress with the book.¹⁾ His stock of material increased so rapidly that in 1793 he was able to say that he possessed 'almost every volume of Scottish poetry, ancient and modern, hitherto printed', and was 'nearly as perfect in Scottish History.'²⁾

Although he had at his command practically all the published material on the subject, yet Ritson occasionally confronted a problem he was unable to solve. In such cases he usually called upon his friends for assistance. On May 23, 1791, he sent Walker a list of twenty-four ancient Scottish tunes and another of ten pieces of ancient Scottish poetry, with this explanation: 'On the suggestion of a friend I have been attempting to chronologize the oldest Scottish music and poetry, now extant, but have no reason to boast of my success. I beg leave, however, to transmit you my lists, meagre and unsatisfactory as they are in hopes of the augmentations or corrections of your friendly hand. . . . No evidence, I conclude can be produced of the existence of any other Scottish tune, now known, prior to the Restoration; nor is any one of the above mentioned tunes to be found noted, either in print or manuscript before that period. Upon what foundation then do we talk of the antiquity of Scottish music?'³⁾

During several of the years in which Ritson was gathering and arranging material, a part of 'Scottish Songs' was at the

1. Ibid, especially I.103, 180, 219.
2. Ibid, II.2.
3. Ibid, I.188-91.

printer's. As early as 1788 it was commonly known that he was engaged upon this collection, and it seems that he even entertained some hope of publishing it in the winter of that year.¹⁾ The actual printing of the work was not begun till June, 1790,²⁾ and then it dragged on so slowly that Ritson could 'form no possible idea of its being completed',³⁾ and exclaimed, 'My bookseller was born to plague me.' After the satisfactory adjustment of difficulties with the engravers, Ritson looked for the publication of his collection by Christmas, 1793.⁴⁾ He had already taken some steps with regard to the sale of the work, as the following extract from an unpublished letter to Laing, will indicate: 'My book is nearly ready for publication, and will certainly appear by or about Christmas. I have not taken the liberty to put your name to it, for which, I take it, on a perusal of the Introduction you will think yourself not a little obliged to me. I cannot easily reconcile your assurance of the sale of a number of copies with your indetermination to take one. The expense of sending a parcel to Edinburgh may be no great object, but to have it returned entire is what I should not like; so that if you will answer for 50 I will send 100, if 25, 50, if 10, 20, if 5, 10, if none, not one, sat verbum.⁵⁾

1. J.C.Walker to Bishop Percy, Sept. 16, 1788, in 'Literary Anecdotes'. VII.709.

2. 'Letters', I.164-168.

3. Ibid, I.127.

4. Ibid, II.12.

5. Nov. 20, 1793. See Appendix A.

It was not until March, 1794, that 'Scottish Songs' was actually published. Ritson sent Laing fifty copies, a few to be distributed 'with the editor's compliments', the rest sold. Apropos of the sale he remarked: 'The expense of advertising once or twice in the Edinburgh papers I must of course be debited with. You will scarcely believe that the publication of these two small and unfortunately unequal volumes stands me in three hundred pounds. I make up my mind of course, to a considerable loss.' 1)

The arrangement of 'Scottish Songs' is quite similar to that followed earlier in 'Englisch Songs'. There are four classes: I. Love Songs. II. Comic Songs. III. Historical, Political, and Martial Songs. IV. Romantic and Legendary Songs, or Ballads. In each case the text is declared to follow exactly the oldest extant copy, printed or manuscript. The notes evince a wide and intimate acquaintance with Scottish history, and reveal interesting anecdotes concerning the subjects of the songs.

The preparation and publication of 'Scottish Songs' brought Ritson into contact with many of the literary men of his day. From Paton, Walker, Harrison, Laing and Campbell he received valuable assistance in the preparation of his collection. From these men, too, came 'observations', 'suggestions', and notices of 'blunders' in the printed work. 2) But Ritson also had more or less connection with the other men who had done work in the same

1. 'Letters', II. 47.

2. Ibid, II. 64, 74, 112.

field. He held no malice towards other editors. His only demand was that they should deal honestly with their material. Laying out him in touch with Herd, and the two men came to be mutually helpful in their labors.¹⁾ Ritson likewise praised the 'Specimens' of Ellis for their elegance and accuracy. But with Percy's editorial laxity he had no patience. If the Bishop must augment his ancient sources, Ritson insisted that he should so far compliment the reader's intelligence as to distinguish between the old and the new. Of Pinkerton's integrity in editorial matters he held no higher opinion. Ritson maintained that it was the business of an editor to give his material exactly as he found it, without alteration or interpolation. And especially did he condemn the editor who sought to deceive the public by presenting modern compositions in the guise of antiquity. For the commission of this literary crime, both Percy and Pinkerton felt the lash of his denunciation. Ritson might have done his own work in his own way and left it to stand on its merits, without assailing any other book or writer. But he could hardly produce a book without revealing, by contrast the faults of others in the same field. By this carping spirit he brought down upon himself ridicule and violent abuse: but the editorial standards for which he fought - the true standards - were the sooner brought forcibly before the literary public.

Because a large number of the pieces included in 'Scottish

1. Ibid, II, 142.

Songs' had formerly appeared in print,¹⁾ Ritson had much to say about the errors, both wilful and unconscious, of his predecessors. He was frequently vituperative, and seldom charitable. This laid him open to the attacks of the Reviewers, who fell to with a will. The most thoroughly depreciative article appeared in the Critical Review, for January, 1795. Ritson is there declared to be 'immodest', 'inaccurate', and 'unscholarly'. He is ridiculed for attempting to give serious consideration to such inconsequential things as ballads, and is accused of sparing no pains 'to reject any improvement, and to restore them to error and imperfection.' 'To us who are accustomed to treat trifles as trifles', exclaims the Reviewer, 'what must appear to be the power of that mind which can descant with such dignity on a ballad?' Here is the poetic judgment of pre-Reliquian days opposing itself to the new light of Romanticism. The knowledge that Pinkerton himself was the author of this Review,²⁾ gives it less the character of a reflection of the critical spirit of the age, and more that of a defense of personal conduct. In reality, not only the tide of popular opinion but that of critical judgment as well, was, by 1795, running strongly in favor of the old popular ballad. ³⁾ That Pinkerton's

1. Forty-six of the songs are taken from 'Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, heroic ballads, etc.'; forty-two from Ramsay's 'Teatable Miscellany'; fourteen from Johnson's 'Scots Musical Museum'; six from Percy's 'Reliques'; and the remainder from ancient manuscripts, and editions of the various authors' poems.

2. Ritson suspected the authorship from the first. See 'Letters' II.67. This article is reprinted in 'Letters from Joseph Ritson to George Paton', Edinburgh, 1929, as 'A critique by John Pinkerton upon Ritson's Scottish Songs.'

3. Witness the increasing number of collections of old poetry. The general commendation given by the Reviewers to Ritson's services in rescuing ancient pieces from oblivion, is typical of the attitude toward other compilers.

attitude was not wholly representative of his time, is evident from a glance at the *British Critic*,¹⁾ where Ritson is praised for his diligence, for his laborious researches in tracing the origin of Scottish songs, and for the recovery of every minute fragment which seems to relate to that subject.

Ritson now turned his attention from general collections of poetry to the remains of an unknown poet of antiquity. In 1795 he issued 'Poems on interesting events in the reign of King Edward III.: written in the year 1352, by Lawrence Minot, with a preface, dissertations, notes, and glossary.'²⁾ Prior to this time Minot was all but unknown. He is mentioned by neither Leland, Bale, Pits, nor Tanner. The first reference to him is in a note to the 'Essay on the learning and versification of Chaucer', in which Tyrwhitt alludes to the discovery of the poems of 'one Lawrence Minot' in 'MS. Galba E. ix' of the Cottonian collection. A copy of the poems was transmitted to Warton for his 'History of English Poetry',

1. *British Critic*, 5.490-502.

2. References are to second edition, 'Poems, written in the year 1352 by Lawrence Minot. With introductory dissertations on the Scottish Wars of Edward III. and on his claim to the throne of France, and notes and glossary.' London, 1825.

The poems were reissued in Thomas Wright's 'Political Poems', 1859, I.58 ff. Two good modern editions exist: Wilhelm Scholle, 'Lawrence Minot's Lieder', in *Quellen und Forschungen*. No. 52, 1884, accompanied by a valuable study of the grammar and meter; and Joseph Hall, 'The Poems of Lawrence Minot', Clarendon Press, 1887, second edition, 1897. Poems iii, v, and part of vii are given in Morris and Skeat's 'Specimens', 1873, II.126 ff.; poems i-iv in Matzner's 'Sprachproben', 1867, I.320 ff.; and poems iii and ix in Wulcker's 'Altenglisches Lesebuch'. See also an inaugural dissertation by Bierbaum, 'Ueber Lawrence Minot und seine Lieder', 1876; and Brink's 'Geschichte der Englischen Litteratur'.

in the third volume of which they are printed with neither scrupulous care nor unfailing accuracy.¹) It remained for Ritson to edit the manuscript, with a degree of faithfulness and care of which few others in his day were capable.

In his edition of Minot Ritson was doing pioneer service, but modern scholarship has found it necessary to reconstruct his judgments but little. Warton dated the unique manuscript in the reign of Henry VI., Ritson in that of Richard II., while Hall places it in the early years of the fifteenth century.

From internal evidence, Ritson placed the conclusion of the poems in 1352, and judged that, because the stirring events following that date are not celebrated, the poet did not live to see them. It has been since conjectured that Minot continued to write after 1352, but his poems have been lost. Of these two theories, Ritson's is the more probable from the absence of any development of style in the poems now extant, which would seem to indicate that Minot was not young when he wrote them.

Of Minot himself nothing is known save what may be gleaned from the poems he has left. From the prevalence of northern forms, Ritson concluded the author was a native of one of the northern counties. There seems however, to be a sufficient mingling of midland forms to indicate that the poet was familiar with both dialects.

1. Part of the errors here were undoubtedly due to Warton's copyist.

Theories as to the author's profession and position in life are equally conjectural. Without pretending to sufficient knowledge of the matter to pass judgment, Ritson surmised that Minot may have belonged to one of the monasteries in the north. Rierbaum presented the view that he was a priest; and ten Brink, that he was a Glee~~f~~man about to become a minstrel. Although there are many religious allusions in the poems, they are not more numerous than is common in Middle English poetry. Furthermore, the tone of these passages is rather that of the man of the world, of the soldier, than the churchman. A contemptuous allusion to being 'polled like a frere'¹⁾ may have considerable weight against Ritson's theory. The most probable suggestion according to Professor Verford ²⁾ is that Minot was a soldierly minstrel who wrote and sang for the army, but was also favored by the court. Ritson recognized that the manner of the poet was not infrequently that of an eye witness, and that many of the poems seem to have been written while the events which they celebrate were still fresh in the author's mind.

Minot's literary excellence lies mainly in his versification. His most frequent measure is the popular six line strophe, but he employs other forms in both rhymed and alliterative verse. He was no mean metricist, but he scarcely merits the exuberant praise bestowed upon him by Ritson: 'In point of ease, harmony,

1. Poem VI. 128.

2. D.N.B. article 'Minot'.

and variety of versification, as well as general perspicuity of style, Lawrence Minot is, perhaps, equal, if not superior, to any English poet before the sixteenth, or even, with very few exceptions before the seventeenth century.'1) In facility of rhyming and choice of words, Ritson gave precedence only to Robert of Brunne and Thomas Tusser. Chaucer he excelled from all comparisons involving creative imagination and poetical fancy.

The poems of Minot are eleven in number. None of them is supplied with a title, but a couplet describing the subject stands at the beginning of each. Ritson's text follows the manuscript closely and accurately, except that it does not include the fourth poem, which lacks the couplet heading. Ritson's notes are mostly historical in character and are chiefly taken from Berner's translation of Froissart, and from the 'Chronicles' of Fabin, Holinshed, and Stow. They are not mere citations or clippings from authority, but are illuminated with Ritson's own vast and intimate knowledge, which serves often to correct and to supplement the ancient writers. Upon two points of importance he enlarged so freely that the material became too bulky for notes and was transferred to the beginning of the book under the titles: Introductory Dissertations. I, On the Scottish Wars of King Edward III.; II. On the title of King Edward III. to the Crown of France. The glossary is necessarily incomplete, as many words here encountered for the first time required further investigation.

On this point Ritson wittily remarks: 'it seems no part of an editor's duty to save his reader the trouble of guessing at the meaning of expressions for which they cannot possibly be more at a loss than he is himself.'¹⁾

Ritson's edition of Minot's poems was received with acclaim by the Reviews.²⁾ The publication of such neglected and forgotten works as this was a notable service not only to the antiquarian, but likewise to the man of taste, to the historian, and to the poet. Here was an office which the erstwhile ^{despised} middle ages might render to modern times. The recognition of the value of the results of antiquarian study to others than antiquaries was only a phase of the general readjustment of literary values which goes by the name of the Romantic movement. Ritson's service in helping to bring about an equalization of the ancient and the modern was by no means unimportant.

It was naturally to be expected that a poetical antiquary, who concerned himself particularly with songs and ballads should eventually take up the subject of Robin Hood. One should expect to find Robin Hood ballads in every volume of 'Ancient Popular Poetry', but one looks in vain for any material concerning the border outlaw in Ritson's collection of that title. Realizing the inconsistency of the omission, Ritson justified his procedure

1. Preface, xviii.

2. See Monthly Review, 102. 464-5; British Critic, 2. 22-5.

in the announcement that he was reserving 'the poems, ballads, and historical or miscellaneous matter relating to this celebrated outlaw', for separate treatment. This promised publication made its appearance in two volumes, 1795, as 'Robin Hood: a collection of all the ancient poems, songs, and ballads, now extant, relative to that celebrated English Outlaw. To which are prefixed Historical Anecdotes of his Life.'¹⁾ A monument of industry, 'Robin Hood' is illustrative at once of the excellencies and the defects of Ritson's editorial system.

The Life of Robin Hood, with which the first volume opens, does not profess to be historically authentic. Although Ritson considered Robin Hood a historical character, he was unable to ground his biography on unassailable authorities. He had recourse only to the legends, anecdotes, and allusions to Robin Hood by numerous writers, ancient and modern, and from these he constructed a history 'which, though it may fail to satisfy, may possibly serve to amuse.' The 'Life' is short, covering only twelve pages: but there are 115 pages of 'Notes and Illustrations.' In this section of the work are to found valuable contributions to the store of Robin Hood information. Ritson took most of the 'facts' of the Life from a manuscript in the Sloane library, but he has accumulated a summarizing mass of Robin Hood allusions from the early writers. In addition to these citations he has constructed a fairly exhaustive chronology of the dramatic exhibitions in

1. References are to second edition, 1832, with 'Tale of Robin Hood and the Monk' added. The third edition with additional illustrations by modern artists appeared in 1935.

which Robin Hood's exploits are recounted,¹⁾ and has listed former Robin Hood collections, as well as the extant poems and ballads concerning the hero. The accumulation and arrangement of this material was the labor of years, and it cannot be ignored by the student of Robin Hood.

As for the remainder of the work, the first volume contains five songs and the second, twenty-eight, each with a brief introduction naming the source of the ballad and the copies with which it was collated. By dint of persevering industry Ritson was able to bring together more songs concerning his hero than had been discovered by any editor before him. With his accustomed fidelity to sources, he gave each of these pieces exactly as he found it, taking only such liberties with his originals as 'the division of stanzas, the indenting of the lines, the addition of points, the disuse of abbreviations and the occasional introduction or refection of a capital letter.' And even these slight alterations are noticed in the margin.

Ritson was accused of allowing his antiquarian zeal to overrun his critical acumen, and of including in his collections pieces which had little but their antiquity to recommend them.²⁾ By paying attention rather to the age of his selections than to their poetic merit, he missed the appeal to popular favor which had been a large element in the success of the 'Reliques', and

1. He has here given extended quotations from the two plays by Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle, usually called the first and second parts of Robin Hood, published 1601.

2. British Critic, 9, 16-22: Fraser's Magazine, 8, 717.

later played its part in the popularity of the 'Minstrelsy'. But while he may be open to the censure of those who seek only pleasant reading, Ritson performed a noteworthy service for scholarship by gathering together all the scattered allusions to Robin Hood and collecting into one view the various poems relating to the outlaw. Such ballads as 'Robin Hood and the Bishop', 'Robin Hood and the Tinker', 'Robin Hood and the Butcher', 'Robin Hood and the Tanner', are scarcely more than variations of a single theme, and would not all have been included by the average eighteenth century editor, had he known of their existence. Even Scott, as late as 1830, took Ritson to task for encumbering his pages with these versions.¹) Yet it is just here that Ritson's work was doubly valuable: it afforded an example of scholarly editorship, and presented an unparalleled mass of Robin Hood material. Thoroughness in investigation and minute accuracy in detail, the standards which Ritson set up for himself, were the same as those by which Child labored in the ballad field more than half a century later. But Ritson was so far in advance of his time that these traits, later considered the highest virtues of a critical editor, were then pointed to as blemishes on an otherwise excellent production. Ritson's contemporaries more readily appreciated the value of the great mass of Robin Hood material which his unexampled industry had

1. See 'Introductory remarks on popular poetry and on the various collections of ballads of Britain, particularly those of Scotland', in 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border', ed. Henderson, 1902, I.46.

enabled him to accumulate.1) It was recognized that by editing the ballads and gathering together the scattered allusions to the border raider, Ritson had placed subsequent Robin Hood investigators deeply in his debt, whether or not they should choose to acknowledge it.2)

1. Edinburgh Review. 86.122-32; Douce's 'Illustrations of Shakespeare', 1807.

2. In Child's collection there are only three Robin Hood ballads added to Ritson's list: 130. 'Robin Hood and the Scotchman': 137. 'Robin Hood and the Pedlars': 155. 'Sir Hugh, or, The Jew's Daughter'. This is eloquent testimony to the thoroughness of his methods.

Gutch declares that the 'Historical Essay in his 'Lytell Geste of Robin Hood', 1847, is 'not grounded on the documents used by Ritson'. However, despite this apparent contempt, he reprints almost the whole of Ritson, without additions, but with more critical insight. For other collections which are largely based on Ritson, see 'Robin Hood' etc., edited by E. Rees, 1820: 'Ancient Poems, etc, relative to Robin Hood', revised from Ritson, 1839: 'Robin Hood and his many foresters', by S. Percy, 1842: 'Robin Hood' etc., from Ritson, and others. 1862.

CHAPTER VI.

Editorial Labors, 1795-1803.

The nervous affection of which Ritson had complained in 1790, was growing more distressing. His hope for permanent relief lay in a complete change of life, such as would be afforded by an extended sojourn in the country. But the only respite from labor that Ritson permitted himself was a brief outing in the summer. In 1791 he made a short visit to France, and returned with a glowing enthusiasm for the new freedom, which he hoped soon to see prevail in England. In the succeeding years he continued his annual visits to Stockton. But despite these brief periods of relaxation, his illness increased. By 1795 writing was attended with so much difficulty that he neglected even his most intimate correspondents. He complained constantly of restlessness and depression of spirits: and feared that he would completely lose his memory. From 1792 on, he wrote scarcely a letter without making some allusion to his impaired health. Under such disadvantageous conditions it is not surprising that the almost constant flow of his publications altogether ceased. From 1782 to 1795 he produced twenty-seven volumes: but the next years were totally barren of press work. However, it is not to be supposed that Ritson lost interest in literary matters during this interval. Although he brought no new book before the public, he had several manuscripts in preparation, and devoted to them as much time as the state of his health permitted. Ritson's interest in Scottish poetry did not cease with the publication of his 'Scottish

Songs', nor was all his collected material utilized in that work. He designed for later publication a volume of 'Select Scottish Poems', which was to contain longer and more modern pieces than the 'Songs'. As the extant manuscript is fragmentary, he probably never completed this work.¹⁾

Perhaps the most elaborate of all Ritson's undertakings was his plan for an 'orthographico-etymological dictionary of the English language.' His own eccentric theory of orthography, first set forth in the Shakespeare papers² and his dissatisfaction with existing dictionaries, probably led him to prepare his own lexicographical guides. Johnson's dictionary he declared to contain the 'strangest mixture of ignorance and idleness that was ever exhibited in such a work.' He ridiculed Croft's ²⁾ pretentious attempt to 'correct all Johnson's errors, supply all his defects, and produce the most finished and perfect specimen of lexicography that has ever appeared in any language or in any country.'³⁾ As early as 1793 Ritson had begun to prepare his own dictionary but for want of 'vigor of mind was forced to lay it aside.'⁴⁾ He took it up a few years later, and completed it for publication.⁵⁾

1. Mr. Perry obtained 42 pages of this MS. with David Laing's copy of 'The Caledonian Muse.' This is all that is known to exist.

2. Sir Herbert Croft (1751-1816) busied himself with the preparation of an English Dictionary from 1786 or 1787 until 1793, when he was forced to abandon it for want of subscribers. He seems to have had no clear 'calling' to the task in hand.

3. 'Letters', I.213.

4. Ibid, II.28.

5. See Appendix D.II. The MS. is now unknown.

During the course of his work on the dictionary, Ritson probably formulated the rules and principles which were collected for publication as 'Gleanings of English Grammar, chiefly with a view to illustrate and establish a just system of orthography, upon etymological principles.'¹⁾

Another unfinished project was a life of the Duke of Wharton. Ritson made some progress with this, using as a basis the 'Memoir' of 1731 and the works of Wharton. His material is still unpublished, and the original Memoir of Wharton was only superseded by Robinson's Life in 1896.²⁾

In 1800, or thereabouts, Sir Walter Scott applied to Ritson for assistance in compiling the 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.' After an appeal to Percy, who expressed only a mild interest in the undertaking, Scott had turned as he said to 'a more unpromising quarter!', and had found just the information he was seeking. The poet's suave courtesy and his unfailing tact in avoiding every thing suggestive of a controversy caused the habitually crabbed and cautious Ritson to communicate 'the stores of his really valuable learning in a manner that seems to have greatly surprised all who had hitherto held any intercourse with him on antiquarian topics.'³⁾ The friendship thus begun continued uninterruptedly throughout the remaining years of Ritson's life. In

1. This MS. has likewise been lost.

2. Ritson's Wharton MS. is now in the possession of Mr. Perry.

3. Lockhart, 'Life of Scott', Ed. 1902. II.54.

the autumn of 1802 he visited Scott at Lasswade Cottage. Dr. Leyden was present on this occasion, and ^{by} his rudeness of manner somewhat irritated the more delicate sensibilities of Ritson. The three men, however, continued on terms of friendship if not of intimacy. Ritson afterwards referred to Leyden as his 'inestimable friend', and for a time hoped that he might be able to make 'another pleasant and interesting visit to Lasswade Cottage.'¹⁾

The extant correspondence proves Scott and Ritson to have been mutually helpful in their respective compilations. Despite his illness Ritson reveals in these letters perfect control of his faculties and his manner is always deferential and unassuming. He seems to feel that he has at last met his superior in medieval learning. When he received a copy of the first edition of the 'Minstrelsy' he thanked Scott in glowing terms for 'the most curious and valuable literary treasure I possess.' 'Everything in it, he said, is 'excellent throughout, both in verse and prose.' He declared his intention of reading it charily, one ballad a day, thus extending his 'exquisite gratification to the most distant period.'²⁾ It was with obvious hesitation that he ventured to suggest a 'few trifling remarks', 'in contemplation of the second

1. Lockhart's ill-natured abuse of Ritson has given rise to a misunderstanding of the nature of the relationship between him and his two Scottish friends, Scott and Leyden. For a correction of Lockhart's point of view see the excerpts from letters quoted in Constable's 'Literary Correspondence', I.497 ff.; and Ritson's 'letters to Scott, 'Letters', II.217, 222, 228, 232, 237.

2. 'Letters', II.222 ff. See also Surtees's 'History and antiquities of Durham,' III.194. note(r).



edition.' These half dozen notes have to do with the interpretation of particular expressions. For the work as a whole there is nothing but praise.

When one recalls that Scott's views on the subject of ballad decency were, like those of his age, lax, and his practise even laxer, one wonders what has become of the Ritson whose main object in life seemed to be to expose and to ridicule the liberties taken by editors of ancient poetry. That Ritson had not, at this period of his life, given over his enmity to editorial laxity is evinced by his latest publications. Scott, alone of all the collectors of ballads, wholly escaped his ire. The poet's good fortune was undoubtedly due to the bland manner in which he treated Ritson. Scott himself, perhaps disturbed by an accusing conscience, was fearful lest Ritson should discover the extent to which he had indulged in textual liberties, and attack him with his customary violence. In 1802 he wrote to Ellis: 'As for Mr. Ritson, he and I still continue on decent terms; and, in truth, he makes patte de velours; but I dread I shall see 'a whisker and then a claw' stretched out against my unfortunate lucubrations.'¹)

It was perhaps due to the inspiration of Scott's friendship that Ritson's interest in literary projects was revived. In spite of his steadily declining health he managed, with great suffering, to see three publications through the press in 1802. Each of them is disfigured by his peculiar orthography, and all are

1. Lockhart, II. 27.

marred by extravagances which betoken failing powers. The condition of his mind serves in large measure to explain, if not to excuse, the extreme violence which characterizes much of the language of these books. The objects of his attacks still are his early enemies: Warton, Percy, Pinkerton, the Reviewers, and Christianity. His last remarks are less reasonable and more vitriolic than former expressions. They differ in degree, not in kind.

The morbid state of mind induced by his illness is exhibited in 'Ancient English Metrical Romances', 1802, 1) the first of Ritson's publications to appear since 1795. The copy first submitted for the prefatory 'Dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy' contained a number of derogatory allusions to Christianity which were so violent that Nicol refused to print it without alteration. Accordingly a dozen of the worst passages were deleted or modified before publication. 2) The melancholy sentence with which the Advertisement concludes affords abundant evidence of Ritson's mental condition. He writes: 'Brought to an end with much industry, and more attention, in a continued state of ill health and low

1. 'Ancient English Metrical Romances', with a prefatory dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy', 3 vols. London, 1802. 2nd. ed. 3 vol. Edinburgh, 1884. In 1891 were published at Edinburgh:
1. 'A dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy, to which is appended the ancient metrical romance of Ywaine and Gawain', which is a reprint of volume I. of the second edition, with new title: and
2. 'Thomas Chestre: Launfal', a reprint of the first romance included in volume II. of the 1884 edition.

2. These cancelled passages were subsequently printed on a separate sheet, which may be found bound in a very few copies of the first edition. All these excerpts are given in Appendix C, but one may be cited here as an illustration of their nature: Vol. III. n. 247, for line 1, substitute 'Merlin, a powerful magician, and a more clear-sighted and veracious prophet than the Jew Isaiah'.

spirits, the editor abandons it to general censure, with cold indifference, expecting little favor, and less profit; but certain, at any rate, to be insulted by the malignant and calumnious personalities of a base and prostitute gang of lurking assassins, who stab in the dark, and whose poisoned daggers he has already experienced.'

There is somewhat more than a tincture of irony in Ritson's professing to take from Percy the suggestion for a compilation on almost every page of which that worthy prelate is branded as a literary forger and editorial malefactor. This irony is obvious in his appropriating Percy's remarks on the value and importance of a judicious collection of ancient metrical Histories and Romances, 1) 'accurately published, with proper illustrations', as praise of his own collection. To the eloquent commendation of this learned and ingenious writer, he says, nothing need be added in favor of the present publication.

Ritson's collection consists of twelve romances, with 'Horn Childe and Maiden Rimnild' added as an Appendix to the second volume. The editorial plan is similar to that followed in the earlier compilations. Each piece is preceded by a brief account of the various manuscripts, and a statement concerning the legendary or historical origin of the romance. With Ritson's customary accuracy the oldest texts are followed and all variant readings as well as editorial emendations are noted with scholarly

1. 'Reliques', 2nd. ed. III. 'Essay on the Ancient Metrical Romances.' pp. xii-xiii.

precision. Many of the ancient texts are here for the first time printed with fidelity. In some cases the editor's principal reason for including the romance seems to have been to expose the errors of former editors. Ritson gives no specific reason for including Chestre's beautiful fairy tale 'Launfal' which had already been published by Ellis in the notes to Way's translations of Le Grand's 'Fabliaux'.¹⁾ There are several explanations of troublesome passages, given with a 'not as mister Ellis says', which might substantiate the view that this romance was given with the peevish purpose of correcting Ellis. 'Lybeaus Disconus' had been printed in the 'Reliques' from a copy in Percy's Folio manuscript. In the general revision of the 'Reliques' for the fourth edition, this romance was made to conform more closely to its original, and the editor's remarks concerning it were altered accordingly. Ritson, who was perhaps more directly responsible than any one else, for this general overhauling of the 'Reliques', declared that Percy's treatment of 'Lybeaus Disconus' in the fourth edition was such as to destroy confidence in what he had advanced concerning it in the third.²⁾ Supposedly to establish an unassailable text of the romance, Ritson printed it from the Caligula Manuscript.

Of the remaining poems, 'Ywaine and Gawain' is the longest and one of the best known. The two shortest, 'Sir Orpheo' and

1. Le Grand D'Aussy, 'Fabliaux or Tales, abridged from French manuscripts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.' Selected and translated by G.L.Way. London, 1800.

2. See 'Essay on the Ancient Metrical Romances', 'Reliques', Volume II.

'The Knight of Curtesy and the Fairy Lady of Faguell', are designated as 'lays or tales, being rather too concise to be denominated metrical romances'. With the possible exception of 'Tristrem', Ritson gives the rank of greatest antiquity to 'The Geste of Kyng Horn'. In contradiction of Percy, who judged this romance to be 'of genuine English growth', 1) Ritson derives it from a French original. In this estimate he had the support of Tyrwhitt and Warton, and later of Morris and others. 2) This theory was long questioned, but finally overthrown only in 1876 by Wissmann. 3) 'The King of Tars', 'Emare', and its counterpart 'Le Bone Florence of Rome' are also traced to French originals. Ritson calls 'The Erle of Tolous' 'an isolated English romance', being unable to go even so far as Warton's vague 'recollection of evidence' that it was by Chestre, author of 'Launfal'. 4) In addition to the strange and whimsical, but genuine English romance 'The Squyre of Lowe Degree', Ritson includes the old metrical 'Chronicle of England' as a romance on the ground that it was originally prepared to be sung or recited in public. 5)

The extensive Glossary is a remarkably accurate work for its day. Both its range and its correctness attest the thoroughness of Ritson's investigations in a field of study then little exploited. 6)

1. Ibid, p.xxi, 2nd ed.

2. For precise references see O.Hartenstein, 'Studien zur Hornsage', Heidelberg, 1902.

3. Wissmann, 'King Horn', 1876, Quellen und Forschungen, xvi.

4. 'Histry of English Poetry', II.103.

5. See Warton's H.E.P. I.92.

6. Skeat pointed out fifteen 'peculiar blunders' but praised the Glossary as a noteworthy example of pioneer scholarship. See 'Notes and Queries', 8 S. 2.3.

George Ellis had some intention of making a collection of ancient romances, but when he learned that Ritson was engaged upon a similar work, he generously relinquished the design in favor of his friend. Not only so but he generously and successfully exerted himself in obtaining Nicol as publisher for Ritson's compilation. This was no easy task, when publishers were reported to 'groan in spirit over the peculiarities of Ritson's orthography.'¹) There can be little doubt that Ritson's wide acquaintance with medieval literature, especially in manuscript sources; his unwearying faculty for research; and his advanced editorial standards, gave him superior claim to the work in hand. But it is equally indisputable that he lacked the taste and judgment of Ellis, and was certain to produce a less popular book.

However, Ellis was not permanently denied the field. Ritson's publication almost immediately fell into neglect, and Ellis took up again his original plan. Early in 1804 Percy asked Thomas Park to undertake a revision of Ritson's work, proffering the use of his own extensive collection of romances. Park declined for two reasons. 'One is that I think Ritson's plan injudicious and his execution of it repulsive: whence his book is likely to prove unsalable. The other is that my highly esteemed and respected friend, Mr. George Ellis, is preparing for publication a general analysis of English metrical romances, intermingled with extracts from the ancient copies, which are curious for the

1. See letter Scott to Ellis in Lockhart's 'Scott', II.87.

illustration of manners, meter, or language, and which will certainly, prove, like his *Specimens of our lyric poesy*, a very popular book.'¹⁾

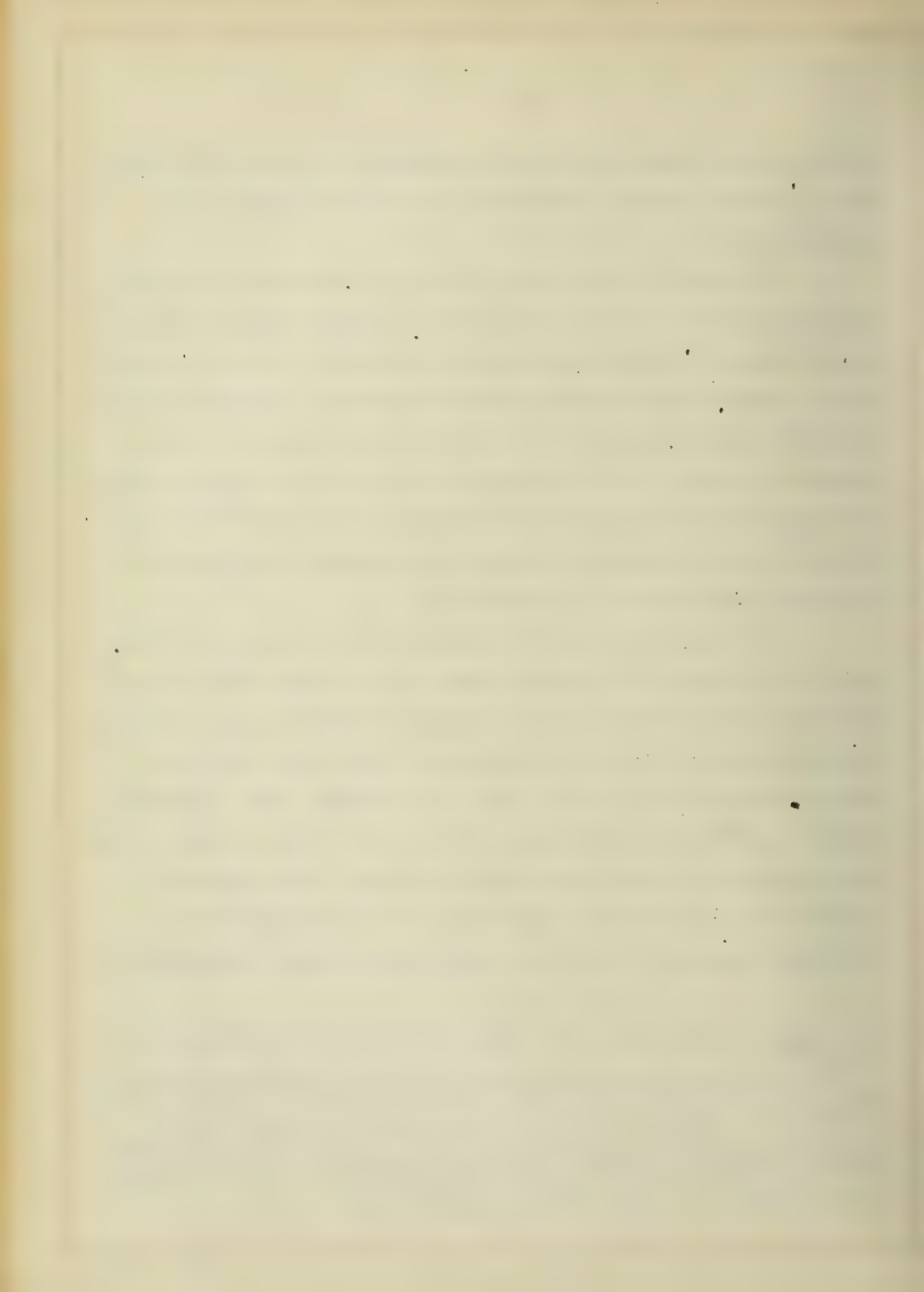
It was the publication of Ellis's '*Specimens of Early English Romances in Metre*', 1805, which revived popular interest in the subject to which attention had first been called by Percy in his '*Essay on the Ancient Metrical Romances*.' Warton's great taste for medieval poetry had led him to investigate romances somewhat in detail in his '*History*', but the first comprehensive work upon the subject was that by Ritson. Yet it remained for Ellis to arouse a popular interest which secured for Ritson's collection the attention it deserved.²⁾

At the suggestion of Steevens, who was unable to fill out a list of authors' initials submitted by Thomas Park, Ritson undertook the compilation of a catalogue of English poets of the early centuries. With the assistance of 'the bibliographical labors of Leland, Bale, Pits, Wood, and Tanner', the 'ingenious though too frequently inaccurate '*History of English Poetry*', Herberts enlarged and improved edition of Ames' '*Typographical Antiquities*', and his own transcript of the registers of the Stationers company, 'obligingly furnished by mister Chalmers';³⁾

1. Park to Percy, Jan. 21, 1804, in '*Literary Illustrations*', VIII. 377.

2. For contemporary reviews see *British Critic*, Sept. 1804 and Jan. 1805; *Crit. Rev.* 39. 179-87; *Edinburgh Rev.* 7. 387-413. Weber in '*Metrical Romances of thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, published from ancient MSS.*' 3 vols. 1810, professes himself indebted to Ritson for correct standards of editorship.

3. See unpublished letters Ritson to Chalmers, Dec. 15, 1798, Dec. 20, 1798, Jan. 29, 1799, in Appendix A.



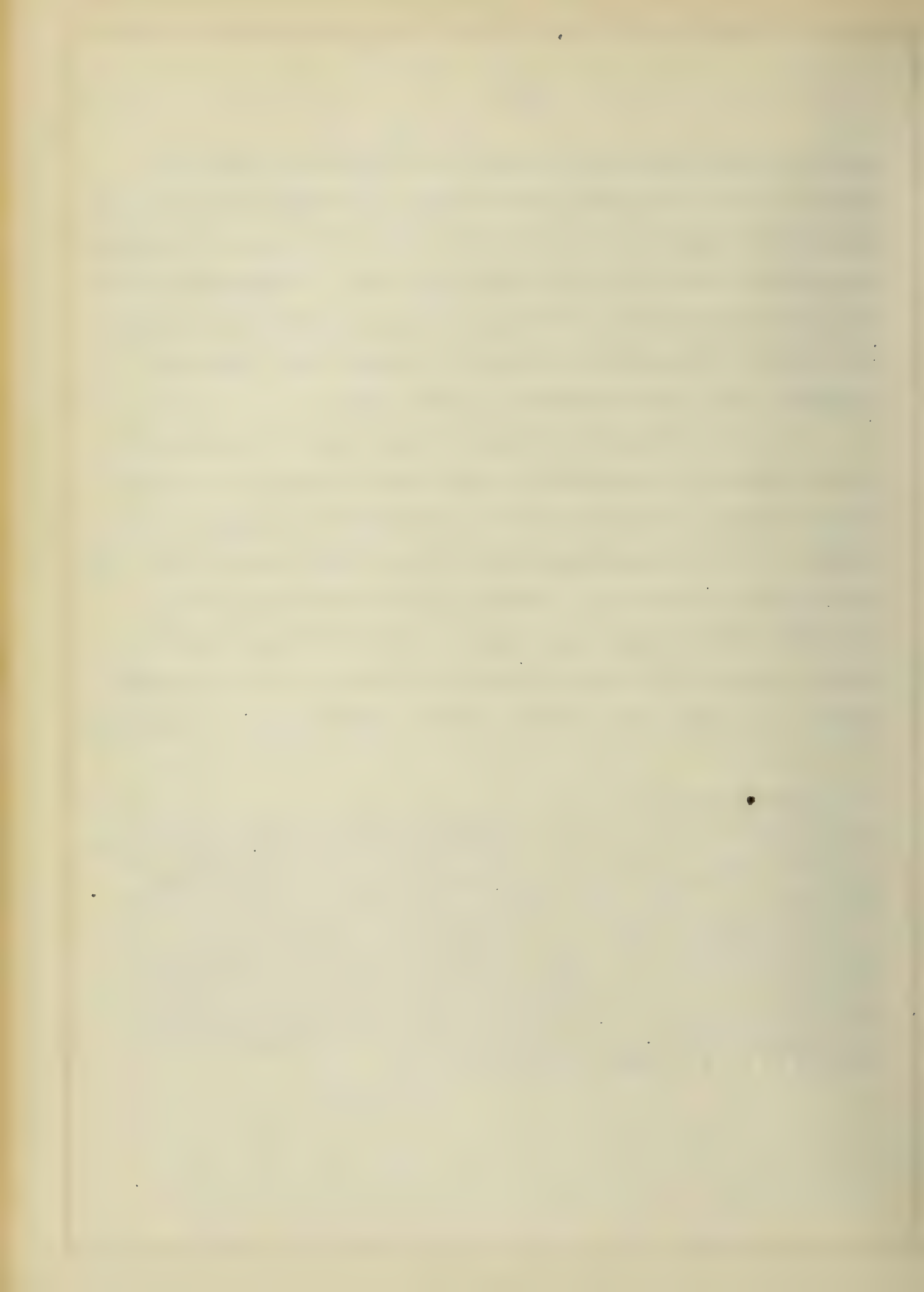
together with numerous books and titles from the libraries of Steevens 1) and Chalmers, and critical suggestions from Douce and Park, Ritson worked out, in the course of a few years, a catalogue surprisingly full and accurate for that day. It was published in 1802 as 'Bibliographia Poetica; a catalogue of English poets of the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centurys, with a short account of their works.'

It would seem that Ritson entered upon the preparation of this volume in collaboration with Francis Douce, 2) but completed it alone, using extensively the material collected by his friend. 3) Before the publication of the 'Bibliographia' the two men had become estranged. Apropos of the disruption of his friendship with Ritson, Douce wrote to Ellis: 'We have taken a formal leave of each other - under our hands and seals, probably forever. We complained of each other's cavilling and contradictory

1. Censura Literaria, I.54.

2. Francis Douce (1757-1834) was a resident of Gray's Inn from 1779 to 1791. He was for a time keeper of the manuscripts in the British Museum, and published many articles of antiquarian interest. He bequeathed to the Bodleian library his magnificent collection of books, manuscripts, prints, and coins; and to the British Museum his letters and unpublished essays.

3. Bodleian MS. Douce. e,5. 'Materials for a biography of English poets to the end of the sixteenth century, collected by J. R(itson) and F.D(ouce)' bears the following inscription on a fly leaf: 'The whole is in Douce's hand, and is the basis of Ritson's 'Bibliographia Poetica.' Presumably Douce undertook to arrange his own and Ritson's notes in this volume, but Ritson formed his book on it by additions and changes.'



tempers, which accidentally colliding with no common violence produced the irreparable breach.'¹⁾ As a result, Ritson makes no mention of his indebtedness to Douce. There is, however, a veiled compliment in the Advertisement to 'Bibliographia Poetica', of which Douce considers himself the subject. 'That the compilation is more extensive, accurate and minute than it otherwise could have been, is owing to the kind attention, and literary exertions, of a very learned and ingenious friend, to whom the public is not less indebted than the editor.' To this sentence, Douce, in his printed copy of the work, added: 'Originally R.D(ouce) but he(i.e. Ritson) afterwards cancelled the name from a bit of spite.'²⁾

Throughout the course of 'Bibliographia Poetica' there are many references to Douce, but Ritson was probably equally indebted to Thomas Park, many of whose notes, signed 'T.P.', are included. Park corrected Ritson's manuscripts twice and added so much valuable material that Ritson volunteered to divide the profits of the sale with him. ³⁾ The first draft of the Preface contained a joint acknowledgment of the assistance rendered by Douce and Park, but when Ritson's altercation with Douce caused the latter's name to be stricken out, Park asked that his be

1. Add MS. 28099.f.47. This letter unfortunately bears no date beyond 'Monday eve'. That it was written later than Feb. 1, 1801, is proved by another letter of Douce to Ellis in the same MS., f. 30, which bears that date, and in which Douce expresses his interest in procuring Nicol as a publisher for Ritson's book.

2. See MS. Douce, e.5.

3. Park to Percy, Nov. 5. 1803, 'Literary Illustrations', VIII. 376.

omitted also. This was accordingly done, and in his ingratitude Ritson neglected even to send Park a copy of the printed work.¹⁾ The condition of Ritson's mind and body at this time in large measure explains his whimsicality and perverseness and to a degree excuses his actions- as illness must excuse many seemingly intended injuries to friends.

'Bibliographia Poetica' was intended as a register of every poetical writer to the end of the sixteenth century. Ritson endeavored to list every poet, whether of renown as Chaucer and Spenser, or whether known only for a translation in English verse of a Latin poem, or for a single ballad sheet, or other promiscuous verse; dramatic pieces alone were excluded.²⁾ In each century the writers are arranged alphabetically, and there is appended an alphabetical list of 'poets, native of England, who wrote in Latin or French.'

Ritson's avowed concern was with names, titles, and dates. He gave the outstanding facts of an author's life, where such were known, but made no attempt to write biography. Neither did he undertake the role of critic, but frequently called attention to the errors of previous historians of the period, and occasionally dropped comments on an author or his work. These remarks bear

1. For Park's version of his connection with 'Bibliographia Poetica' see Haslewood's 'Life', p.23 ff.

2. Reed published the second edition of Baker's 'Companion to the Playhouse' 1764, as 'Biographia Dramatica' in 1782. With this valuable work Ritson said his own compilation was intended in no way to interfere.

always the stamp of Ritson's individuality and usually reveal keen judgment. His estimate of Lydgate and his voluminous products is characteristic: 'But, in truth, and fact, these stupid and fatiguing productions which by no means deserve the name of poetry, and their still more stupid and disgusting author, who disgraces the name and patronage of his master Chaucer, are neither worth . . . collecting nor even worthy of preservation.' In his 'elaborate drawlings there are scarcely three lines together of pure and accurate meter.'¹⁾

This condemnation comes at the end of twenty-four pages devoted to Lydgate, in which 251 titles are listed. Ritson is by no means certain that his list is exhaustive or that it does not contain works wrongly attributed, but he is justified in proclaiming it to be 'the completest list that can be formed, without access at least, to every manuscript library in the kingdom.'²⁾ His own estimate of his work has been substantiated by time. The Lydgate list contains many works of Chaucer and other contemporaries, and a single work is occasionally multiplied by two, three, or even ~~for~~ four, by means of the repetition of varying titles. But, 'with all its imperfections on its head', it remains a monument of industry. Necessarily faulty to a degree, it was a marvelous achievement for its day - something not approached in its time, and perhaps, not

1. 'Bibliographia Poetica', p.88.

2. Ibid, p.87.

approachable by any other man then living, and not exceeded since.

1) Modern calumniators of Ritson should bear in mind that to the dry and thankless task of chronicling names and titles he brought a breadth of knowledge and a thoroughness of method which made his work as little liable to error as it is possible for that of any pioneer to be.

Ritson's outburst against the 'drivelling' Monk of Bury-St. Edmond is given with his usual exaggeration, but his judgment of Lydgate's poetic ability persists well into the present day. 2) Despite the marvelous advance of interest in ancient English poetry, Lydgate was pretty generally neglected during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, but it seems impossible to determine whether Ritson's pronouncements (and any influence in bringing about or perpetuating this neglect. The ultimate effect of Ritson's words concerning the work of an earlier author than Lydgate is perhaps less difficult to gauge. I refer to 'Piers Plowman'.

Up to the publication of 'Bibliographia Poetica' 'Piers Plowman' had been known in only one text - that now known as the B-text. 3) In investigating the numerous manuscripts of this poem,

1. H.M. MacCracken, 'The Lydgate Canon', London, 1908, corrected Schick's chronology of Lydgate's ('The Temple of Glass', London, 1891), but does not consider his own catalogue exhaustive.

2. Saintsbury remarks (History of Prosody', p. 221 n.): 'Some of Lydgate's recent German editors and champions have been nearly as severe on Ritson himself. There is nothing to be said for his temper or his manners: but the man who knows what he knew a hundred years ago is not to be belittled by those who have profitted (or not) by nearly four generations of his and others' labors.'

3. It was first edited by Robert Crowley in 1550, and again by Owen Rogers in 1561.

Ritson was struck with the degree in which some of them differed from the printed copies. 'In order to enable any curious person to distinguish at first sight to which of the two editions (as one may call them) any new manuscripts he may happen to meet with belongs', Ritson quotes the opening lines of the B- and C-texts. The variations, he thinks, may be due to the fact that at some time the author revised his original work, 'giving as it were a new edition.' Without attempting any statement of priority, he conceives that 'it may be possible for a good judge of ancient poetry, possessed of a sufficient stock of critical acumen, to determine which was the first and which was the second.'¹⁾ Manuscripts of 'Piers Plowman' were so numerous (there are not less than forty-five extant today) that it is not surprising that even Ritson failed to collate all of them from beginning to end. This probably accounts for his failure to discover that the poem exists in three distinct forms instead of two. He perhaps compared A-text manuscripts only through the opening lines in which they agree closely with B, while the two manuscripts he selected for thorough comparison happened to be a B-text and a C-text.²⁾ Although it was

1. 'Bibliographia Poetica', p.29 n.

2. Ritson mentions nine separate manuscripts, at least two of which are of A-version, and speaks in general of 'others'. The present highly unsatisfactory state of the text may be gathered from Anott's account of his preparation of a critical text of the A-version from the fourteen imperfect MSS. extant. 'An Essay toward the Critical text of the A-version of 'Piers the Plowman'. Modern Philology, XII.129-161.

nearly a quarter of a century before the A-text was discovered, 1) it was Ritson who laid the foundation for the 'Piers Plowman' problem. 2)

Ritson entertained no delusion concerning the exhaustiveness of his labors in compiling 'Bibliographia Poetica'; his chief ambition was to make a useful catalogue of the early English poets, with the hope that it would be corrected and supplemented by other students. The value of the work has been generally recognized 3) although some critics have insisted on citing only its inaccuracies and, by ignoring its purpose, censuring it for affording only 'dry and uninteresting reading' 4) Almost immediately upon its publication 'corrections' and 'additions' began to appear, and Joseph Haslewood undertook a new edition, which was never put to press. 5)

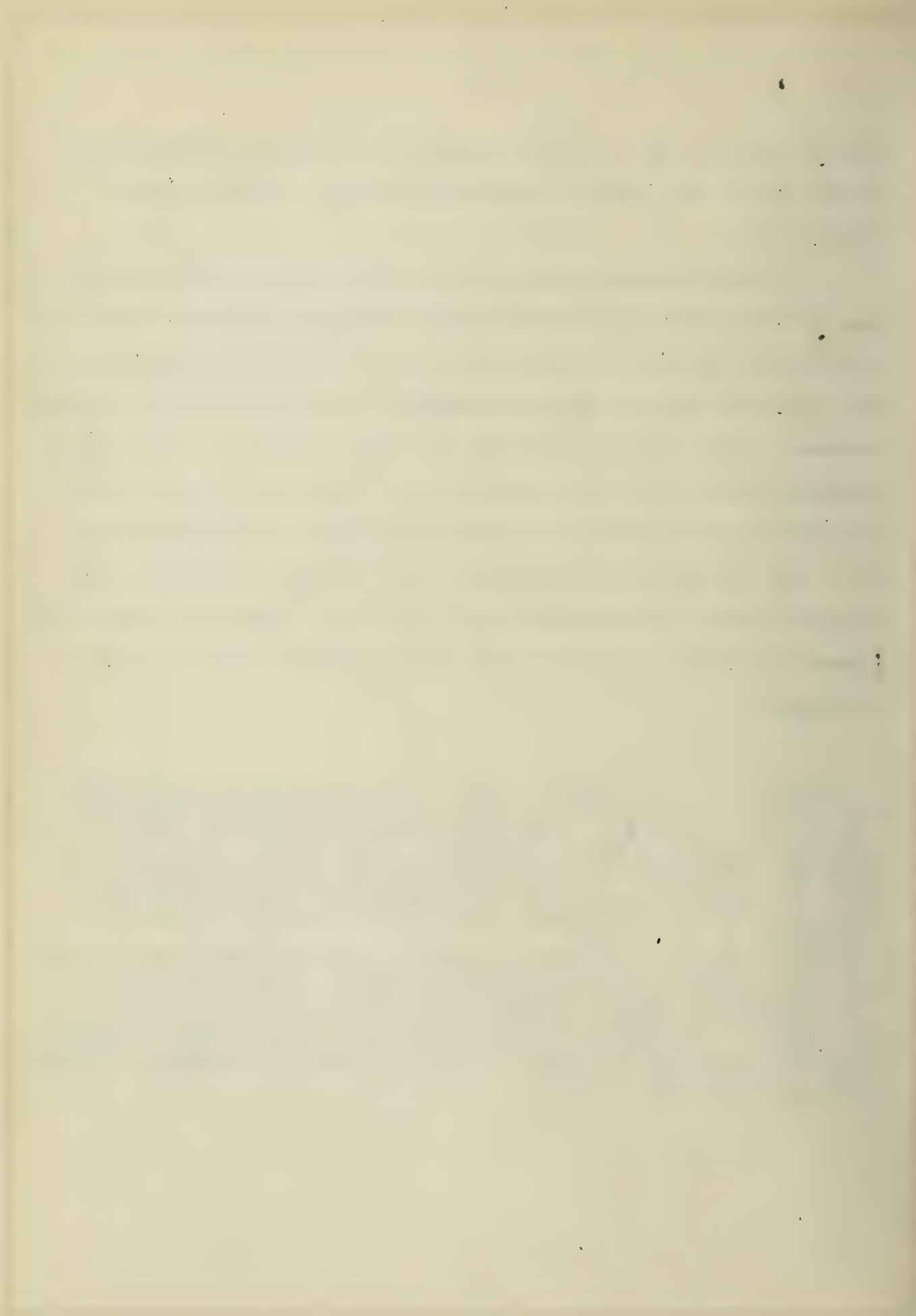
1. Price, in his edition of Warton's H.E.P., 1824, discovered the A-text, and arranged the three versions in their proper order.

2. For the genesis of this problem see Samuel Moore, 'Studies in Piers the Plowman', Modern Philology, XI. 177-93. Moore states that the 'tradition' to which Jusserand appeals in attempting to shift the burden of proof to the shoulders of Manly began with Price; yet it had its partial but definite origin in Ritson's discovery of the C-text.

3. See 'Dibden's Director', I.126-8; Brydges' 'Restituta', II.10; 'The English Chaucerians', 'Cambridge History of Eng. Lit.', II.

4. See D.N.B. art. 'Lydgate'; 'Censura Literaria', I.158.

5. This was no doubt the work announced in Gentleman's Magazine for October, 1814, 'to be put to press next year.' Many of Haslewood's corrections appeared over his initials in 'Censura Literaria' V.131-6; VI.29-34.



At the same time with the preparation of 'Bibliographia Poetica', Ritson was collecting material for a catalogue of Scottish writers. He called upon Scott 1) and other friends for assistance in this project, and succeeded in preparing the copy for the printer but did not live to publish it. The manuscript entitled, 'Bibliographia Scotica; Anecdotes, Biographical and Literary, of Scottish writers, Historians, and Poets from earliest accounts to the nineteenth century' was a desideratum with Scott, but was purchased by Longman 'for the trade', and since 1875 has disappeared from sight.2)

Among the numerous literary projects to which Ritson was giving intermittent and half-hearted attention during the years of his severe illness was one about which his biographers have said nothing. On December 26, 1792 he wrote to Harrison: 'I must with shame confess that I have not yet begun the transcript of 'Captain Hodgson's Memoirs', and that it is owing much more to want of inclination than to want of leisure.'3) A year and a half elapsed before he had copied the manuscript and was ready to return it. At that time he wrote: 'I return your manuscript of Captain Hodgson's 'Memoirs', which I have carefully transcribed, but dare not yet venture to put to the press, being already in

1. See 'Letters', II.241.

2. See letter Scott to Ellis, Oct. 14, 1803; in Lockhart's 'Scott', II.136; Park to Hill, Dec. 8, 1803, Add. MS.20083, f.118; 'Notes and Queries', 5 S. 10. 287, 412.

3. 'Letters', I.224.

advance, one way or another, above five hundred pounds; a good part of which I begin to fear, will never find its way back.'¹⁾ 'The Memoirs of John Hodgson, touching his conduct in the civil wars, and his troubles after the Restoration', was published with Ritson's Preface on 1806.²⁾ Ritson declared it to be his opinion that in point of importance, interest and even pleasantry Hodgson's narrative was infinitely superior to Defoe's 'Memoirs of a Cavalier' although others have been less enthusiastic in their praise.³⁾

Ritson intended for publication in the year 1785 a collection of Scottish poetry entitled 'The Caledonian Muse'. Although the volume had engaged his attention 'for a great many years' it was not wholly ready for the press at that time. It was, however, printed as far as prepared and subsequently advertised as an edition of 1785.⁴⁾ Ritson himself refers to it frequently in his later works as 'printed some years since', or 'not yet published', etc.⁵⁾

1. Ibid, II.54.

2. 'Original memoirs, written during the great Civil War; being the life of Sir H. Slingsby, and memoirs of Captain Hodgson', with notes, etc. Ed. by Sir Walter Scott. Edinburgh, 1806.

3. Carlyle styles Hodgson 'an honest-hearted, pudding-headed Yorkshire puritan.' 'Oliver Cromwell', I.333; III.177, 180.

4. On a page of advertisements of 'books published J. Johnson', (Scottish Songs, 1794, II.) appears this notice: 'The Caledonian Muse, a chronological selection of Scottish poetry, from the earliest times to the present: with notes and a glossary: and elegant vignettes, engraved by Heath, from the designs of Stothard. (a) To which is added, an essay 'on the author of Christ's kirk on the Green.'

(a) Sidney Lee, D.N.B. art. 'Ritson', says the designs were by Thos. Bewick.

5. See Advertisement to 'English Anthology'; 'Scottish Songs', I. p.xxx.n, 20, and p.xxxvi and note.

On March 5, 1794, Ritson wrote to Paton: 'The impression of another little volume, of which I believe I shewed you a fragment, entitled 'The Caledonian Muse', which had engaged my attention for a great many years, and was at last got ready for publication, has been lately destroyed by fire in the printer's house; so that I neither possess, nor can procure, one single complete copy. 'Sic transit gloria mundi!'¹⁾ Ritson's belief that the whole impression was at that time destroyed has persisted among his biographers ²⁾ in spite of the fact that the volume has since been published as 'printed in 1785.' In reality only the manuscript of the introductory essay was destroyed, and more than 400 copies of the printed, though incomplete work, were saved. These remained untouched in Johnson's shop until his death in December, 1809, after which they were purchased by Robert Triphook.³⁾ The only authentic account of the later history of the volume is given in an unpublished letter of Triphook, which unfortunately bears neither address nor date.⁴⁾

1. 'Letters', II.45.

2. See Nicolas and D.N.B.

3. In a note to Ritson's 'English Songs', 2nd, ed. 1813, Thos. Park says: 'Mr. Triphook, jun. bookseller in St. James St. has purchased that portion of (Caledonian Muse) which escaped conflagration, and purposes to complete and publish it, according to the original plan.'

4. This letter is in Andrew Laing's copy of 'The Caledonian Muse', now in the possession of Mr. Perry. From a paragraph not here quoted it appears to have been written to an Edinburgh bookseller.

He writes^s: 'I send you with this (a copy of Ritson's 'Caledonian Muse) complete so far as I have it. Sheet 2 was printed by me in continuation, and the copy for the remainder of the volume with rather a long life of Ritson to be prefixed, was lent to Mr. Heber for his perusal some six years ago, but by some unfortunate accident it was either lost or mislaid, and it has remained in the state I now send it ever since.' 1) The number of the Caledonian Muse is about 420, a few more or less. I have also a portrait (Shade) of Ritson engraved by me for the purpose of placing with the volume of which no impressions have yet been taken. I will dispose of the whole to you at Two shillings a Book and Five guineas the copper. Mr. Haslewood (who collected the materials for the Life) has a portion of Manuscript ready transcribed for the press in order to finish the work.' 2)

Trinhook did not succeed in disposing of the work, and in 1821 published it himself, with the following title page: 'The Caledonian Muse: a chronological selection of Scottish poetry from the earliest times. Edited by the late Joseph Ritson, Esq. With

1. Since Trinhook did not acquire the Caledonian Muse before 1810, this statement would place the composition of the letter in 1816 or after.

2. In Brydges' 'British Bibliography', 1814 (iv, 302) appears the following notice signed with the initials 'J.H.', evidently Joseph Haslewood: 'It is my attention to attempt a conclusion of the last part of (Ritson's Caledonian Muse), and submit the volume within a very short period, to the candor of the sons of Caledonia, rather than suffer any relic of the accurate Ritson to be lost.' If the material which Haslewood prepared 'within a very short period' is that to which Trinhook refers in the last line quoted, 1816 would be a highly probable date for his letter.

vignettes engraved by Heath, after the designs of Stothard. London; Printed 1785; and now first published, by Robert Triphook, 23, Old Bond Street, 1821.' It evidently appears in the incomplete state in which it was left by Ritson. The 'Life' and the proposed additions by Haslewood 1) do not appear and the publisher states that the 'only additions have been the Title, and a Portrait.'

The 'Caledonian Muse' consists of a chronological arrangement of Scottish poetry. (songs excluded) in three divisions, comprising respectively: Authentic Poems; Poems by uncertain authors; and Extracts. There are but a few notes and these appear in the first pages of the book. It is to be regretted that Ritson's 'Essay on the author of Christ's Kirk on the Green' was destroyed. He contended that the poem was erroneously ascribed to James I. 2) and in this volume attributes it to James V., but his reasons are nowhere to be found.

This collection was probably begun in the heat of Ritson's reaction against Pinkerton's slovenly methods of collecting and publishing Scottish poetry, and his failure to complete it may have been due to his work on other publications, and especially 'Scotish Songs', 'Scotish Poems', and 'Bibliographia Scotica', - as well as to the printer's difficulties.

The last volume to be prepared by Ritson for the press was the 'Life of King Arthur'. It was intended for immediate publication but was rejected by Longman for ^areason which Ritson

1. Haslewood probably used the biographical materials he had collected for this volume in his own 'Life and Publications of Ritson', 1824.

2. 'Scotish Songs', I. p. xxxvi, n.

explains thus to Scott: 'I have put into Mr. Longman's hands at his own request, for the opinion of some critic he is used to consult, my 'Life of King Arthur', but whether the partners to whom I was recommended by our worthy friend Dr. Leyden, will undertake the publication, I much doubt, as Mr. Longman thinks my orthography unfavorable to its sale and Mr. Rees was apprehensive I should treat the Welshmen with too much familiarity, an apprehension, I confess, which will turn out to be well founded.'¹⁾

Ritson had no further opportunity to seek a publisher for 'King Arthur', and it did not appear until 1825, the third of his posthumous publications.²⁾ Joseph Frank, Ritson's nephew, supervised the printing but did no 'editing' save to eliminate the objectionable orthography. He made no attempt at criticism, and offered only a single comment of the work: 'The difficulty of the subject may be partly estimated from doubts having been actually entertained by the author, during his early researches, as to the identity of his hero, and fears lest the real Arthur might not, after all, be found:

'So many of his shadows 'had he' met,
And not the very king.'

In the Preface Ritson concerned himself mainly with demonstrating that Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'Historia Britonum' is 'a series of palpable and monstrous lies', and that the Britons

1. 'Letters', II.238.

2. 'The Life of King Arthur: from ancient historians and authentic documents'.

or Welsh, by professing to believe it authentic have shown themselves to have 'more vanity and less judgment than any other people in the world.' He ignored altogether the literary importance of Geoffrey's work and seemed to feel that because the 'Historia' was a forgery its author deserved nothing but condemnation and abuse. From the absence of any mention of Arthur by historians prior to the twelfth century, Ritson concluded that Geoffrey had invented the whole of his pseudo-history. He admitted that the Bishop may have had the Latin Nennius before him, but flatly denied the existence of the Welsh originals. Beyond Nennius and the romance of Charlemagne, he contended that Geoffrey had nothing to draw upon but his own fertile imagination. For support of his charge of infidelity Ritson turned to Geoffrey's contemporaries. He quotes at length from the Preface to William of Newburgh's chronicle,¹⁾ which he considers 'not only a criticism of extraordinary merit, for the time, but even the only thing of the kind to be found in ancient English literature.' The tone of this Preface is as intemperate as Ritson's own: - 'How petulantly and how impudently he (Geoffrey) lies.' The testimony of Giraldus Cambrensis, 'himself a Welshman and a bishop', who calls the British History a 'lying book',²⁾ is considered sufficient to clinch Ritson's argument.

1. 'Historia Rerum Anglicarum', c.1200, ed. by T.Hearne, Oxford, 1719.

2. 'Descriptio Cambriae', ed. Powel, London, 1585.

It is obvious that Ritson took keen delight in his arraignment of Geoffrey. If he recognized the tremendous influence of 'Historia Britonum' upon subsequent literature, he studiously avoided any mention of it, and seemed obsessed with the idea that fraud or deception on the part of an author destroyed the value of everything he wrote. Such an obsession is, perhaps, a not unnatural product of twenty years activity in hunting down literary impostors.

In the 'Life of King Arthur' proper, Ritson is less the controversialist and more the historian. By implication he is all along rectifying the erroneous statements of Geoffrey, but, with a few exceptions, he avoids comparisons. He has collected a mass of interesting quotations from what he considered authentic historians - Caesar, Tacitus, Nennius, carefully distinguishing the scholia of Samuel, Leland, etc. - and arranged them in chronological order. It was his purpose to present a history of Britain through the reign of Arthur in particular, and carefully to sift out the authentic facts from the mass of tradition and legend which had accumulated about his hero. In the labor of gathering from remote and obscure sources material on a definite subject, Ritson was unequalled by any one in his day. But he had not the ability to weave his extracts into an interesting and continuous narrative, and he seldom ventured to deduce inferences or draw conclusions. As a result of his merits he has left, in this and

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It is essential for the business to have a clear and concise record of all income and expenses. This will allow the business to track its financial performance over time and identify areas for improvement. The second part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all assets and liabilities. This will allow the business to track its net worth over time and identify areas for improvement. The third part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all debts and obligations. This will allow the business to track its financial obligations over time and identify areas for improvement. The fourth part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all taxes and other legal obligations. This will allow the business to track its financial obligations over time and identify areas for improvement. The fifth part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all other financial information. This will allow the business to track its financial performance over time and identify areas for improvement.

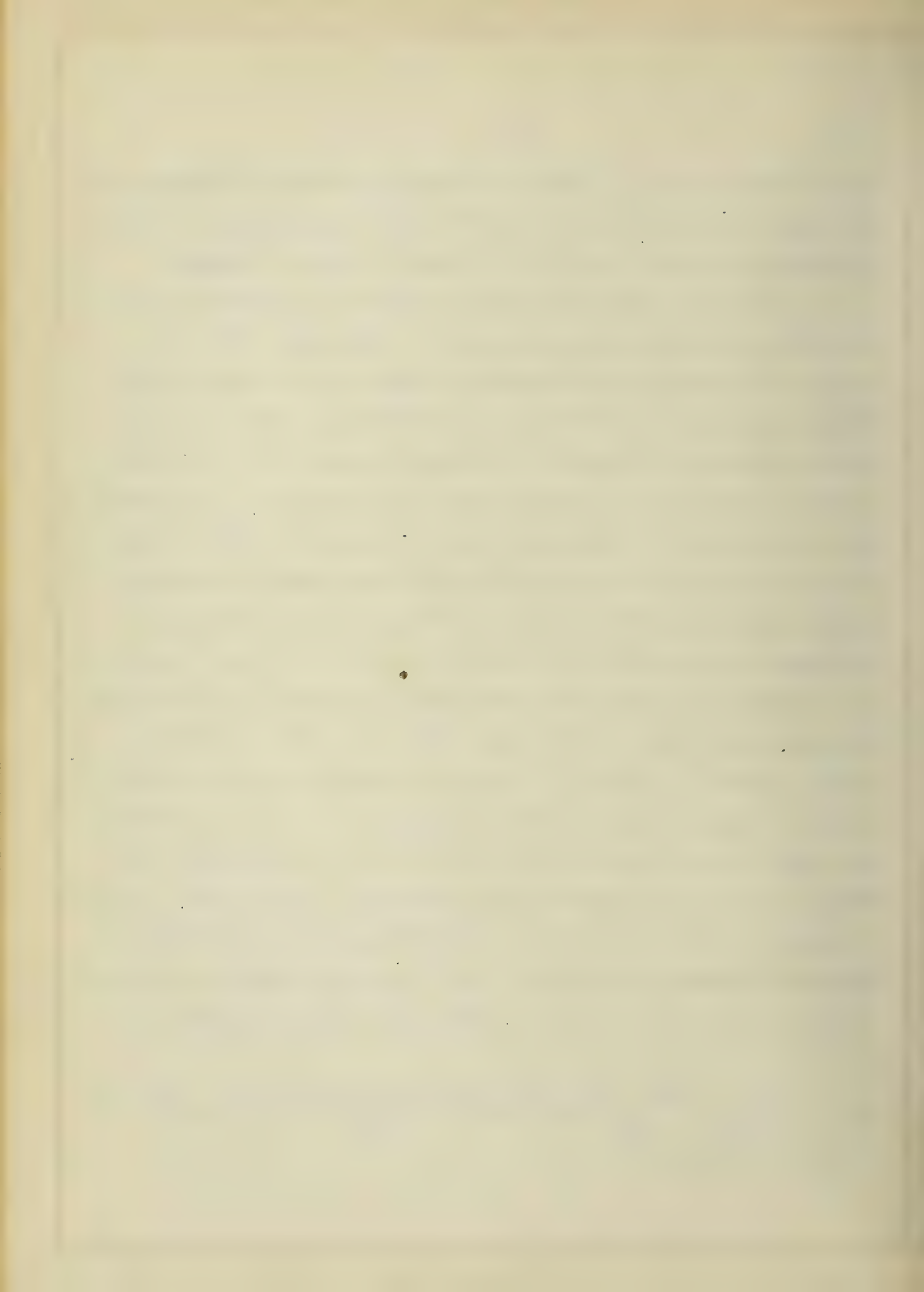
other compilations 1) a mass of valuable material; but because of his defects it remains to be worked over by some person of greater constructive talents before it becomes of general interest.

Ritson's two subsequent publications, of which the same criticism is to be made, were obviously undertaken with the purpose of discrediting Pinkerton's theory of the origin of the ~~Celts~~ ^{Scots}. On August 22, 1795 he informed Harrison that he was employing himself 'very busily in researches after the Celts, the Picts, and the Scots', adding by way of explanation, 'I am quite sick of the modern writers of ancient history, who think to make amends by their fine language for their total want of industry, truth, and candor.' 2) The results of this investigation were published as 'Memoirs of the Celts or Gauls', 1827; and 'Annals of the Caledonians, Picts, and Scots; and of Strathclyde, Cumberland, Galloway, and Murray.' 2 volumes, 1828. The 'memoirs' Ritson made no effort to publish. In his last extant letter it is referred to as being 'laid by for the present.' 3) But the 'Annals' was ready for publication by the end of 1801 at which time he wrote to Constable concerning it: 'My annals of the Picts, Scots, Strathclyde Britons, Cumbrians, Galwegians, and men of Murray, in Latin and English^{ish}, with which I have taken great pains, and which is certainly a very curious book for that sort of learning, is

1. Notably: 'Robin Hood': and 'Memoirs of the Celts', Annals of the Caledonians', and 'Fairy Tales' - now to be considered.

2. 'Letters', II.99.

3. Ibid, II.248.



now ready for the press. If you think it would answer for your shop, it is at your service; but I do not wish you to venture upon it, if you are not perfectly satisfied, though we should likewise have the name of a good bookseller in London. Think on this and tell me your mind.'¹⁾ Although Constable did not accept the work at this time, it was through his interest that it was sent to Ballantyne, by whom it was printed, a quarter of a century later.²⁾ These two histories were edited by Frank, who professes to have altered the original manuscripts no whit, save to reduce Ritson's 'peculiar orthography to the standard of our language' and to 'omit a few hasty epithets, appearing to be harsher than the occasion could require or justify, (which the author, had he lived to publish the works himself, would, probably, have altered)' - a conjecture which the violence of Ritson's latest denunciations seems not to support.

In 'Memoirs of the Celts' Ritson brought together all the allusions to the Celts which he was able to gather from poets and historians of the Middle Ages. These extracts he arranged in twenty-one chapters and ten appendices, treating of almost every

1. Constable 'Literary Correspondence', I. 498.

2. Constable wrote to Scott, Sept. 29, 1825: 'I am glad to say I have had it in my power to send Ballantyne two or three jobs within the last week - one of them the History of the Picts, by our old friend Ritson'. Constable 'Literary Correspondence', I. 328. This was one of the last exchanges between the two publishers whose bankruptcy, within a few months, involved Scott in pecuniary losses, which burdened the rest of his life.

detail of the customs, habits, and personal characteristics of the people, as well as their origin and their language. In the 'Annals of the Caledonians, etc.' it was his object to present 'a chronological account of the inhabitants of the country known, for the first time, by the name of Caledonia, and, in successive ages, by those of Albany, Pictland, Scotland, and North Britain, from the earliest period which history affords, and from the most ancient and authentic documents which time has preserved, and with that attention to truth and accuracy which integrity and utility require.' His sources, as in the former work, were ancient historians and poets - especially the Latin chroniclers.

Ritson's method is to follow a general historical introduction to each nation or people, by all the passages concerning it which he was able to garner. It is distinctly to his credit, that, though he held a brief for the Celts, and though he was concerned with establishing his theory in opposition to that supported by Pinkerton, yet he did not stoop to the methods of the dialectician, by presenting only his own side of the case, but fearlessly gave every reference he found, irrespective of its bearing on his thesis. Such a method manifestly disarms criticism and inspires confidence.

The last of Ritson's publications appeared in 1831: 'Fairy Tales, now first collected: to which are prefixed two dissertations. 1. On Pygmies; 2. On Fairies'. There is no mention of this work anywhere in his extant correspondence, but it seems probable that the twenty-nine Fairy tales, in both prose and verse

and the six Fairy songs, which compose the body of the volume, were brought together in the 1780's when he was concerned with collecting and publishing the noetic 'Garlands'. Yet from internal evidence it appears that the prefatory Essays could not have been composed earlier than 1794.

In the first edition of the 'Reliques' Percy had printed with an old ballad of 'Robin Good Fellow',¹⁾ two woodcuts which he said 'seem to represent the dresses in which this whimsical character was formerly exhibited upon the stage.' Ritson produced evidence purporting to prove that these cuts were originally used to represent two of the characters in Bulwer's 'Artificial Changeling', and had nothing to do with Robin Good Fellow.²⁾ Because Percy altered his remarks in the fourth edition of the 'Reliques' but did not pay homage to Ritson for his correction, the critic finds occasion in the present Essay to ridicule the 'contemptible tone of the pertinacious prelate.' However little these contemptuous comments may illuminate the subject of Fairies, they serve to exhibit the nature of their author, and incidentally prove that 'Fairy Tales' was not completed earlier than 1794.

Aside from this and one other blemish,³⁾ the Essay on Fairies is delightful reading. It seems evident that Ritson

1. See second edition of 'Reliques', III.202, 358.

2. See 'Scottish Songs', 1794, I.n.cx. note.

3. Ritson's ridiculous treatment of Steevens for his remarks on the mortality of fairies. See ante p.110 and note.

sought to adapt his material to youthful readers, but he could not avoid learned and obscure quotations with their accompanying footnotes. By means of citations from writers of various countries and different ages, he demonstrated the universality of the belief in fairies. He then turned to Oberon, Puck, Robin Good Fellow, and Titania, whose dress, appearance, and habits are illustrated by happy extracts from Chaucer, Shakesneare, Milton, and lesser English poets. The Essay concludes with a touch of personal reminiscence which is extremely rare in Ritson's writings: 'The compiler of the present sheets remembers, when very young, to have heard a respectable old woman, then a midwife at Stockton, relate, that, when, in her youthful days, she was a servant at Durham, being up late one Saturady night, cleaning the irons in the kitchen, she heard these shrikes (of the Barguest), first at a great, and then at a less distance, till, at length, the loudest, and most horrible, that can be conceived, just at the kitchen-window, sent her upstairs, she did not know how, where she fell into the arms of a fellow-servant, who could scarcely prevent her fainting away.'¹⁾

In concluding the chronology of Ritson's editorial labors it will be well to summarize his work and attempt to estimate its importance. In a period of twenty years - only thirteen of which were actively employed in publishing - he saw through the press forty volumes and prepared as many more for publication. Of these, nine were printed after his death; the others either were destroyed

1. 'Fairy Tales', n.58.

The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the various branches of industry and commerce. It is followed by a detailed account of the operations of the different departments of the government, and a summary of the results of the various public works and improvements. The report concludes with a statement of the total amount of the public revenue and the expenditure for the year.

The second part of the report contains a detailed account of the operations of the different departments of the government, and a summary of the results of the various public works and improvements. It is followed by a statement of the total amount of the public revenue and the expenditure for the year.

The third part of the report contains a detailed account of the operations of the different departments of the government, and a summary of the results of the various public works and improvements. It is followed by a statement of the total amount of the public revenue and the expenditure for the year.

The fourth part of the report contains a detailed account of the operations of the different departments of the government, and a summary of the results of the various public works and improvements. It is followed by a statement of the total amount of the public revenue and the expenditure for the year.

The fifth part of the report contains a detailed account of the operations of the different departments of the government, and a summary of the results of the various public works and improvements. It is followed by a statement of the total amount of the public revenue and the expenditure for the year.

The sixth part of the report contains a detailed account of the operations of the different departments of the government, and a summary of the results of the various public works and improvements. It is followed by a statement of the total amount of the public revenue and the expenditure for the year.

The seventh part of the report contains a detailed account of the operations of the different departments of the government, and a summary of the results of the various public works and improvements. It is followed by a statement of the total amount of the public revenue and the expenditure for the year.

The eighth part of the report contains a detailed account of the operations of the different departments of the government, and a summary of the results of the various public works and improvements. It is followed by a statement of the total amount of the public revenue and the expenditure for the year.

The ninth part of the report contains a detailed account of the operations of the different departments of the government, and a summary of the results of the various public works and improvements. It is followed by a statement of the total amount of the public revenue and the expenditure for the year.

The tenth part of the report contains a detailed account of the operations of the different departments of the government, and a summary of the results of the various public works and improvements. It is followed by a statement of the total amount of the public revenue and the expenditure for the year.

or remain still in manuscript. The printed volumes consist of collections of poems, songs, ballads, and romances; legal antiquities; critical comments; and historical extracts. The material of but few of these volumes is original. Ritson is their editor, not their author; and it was as an editor that he exerted most influence upon his age. His editorial creed may be summed up in one word - honesty. To be more explicit, he insisted on recourse to the most ancient sources: on fidelity to originals in transcribing: on a candid notation of all necessary variations and additions; on a free acknowledgement of obligations; and on exact references to all quotations. These principles he followed in his own publications: and he insisted with a great deal of vehemence that other editors should adhere to them, and unsparingly condemned those who went contrary to his precepts. Tyrwhitt had anticipated Ritson by nearly a decade in giving to England an example of scholarly editing: but, while his work attracted the favorable comments of nearly all critics, it did not operate as a reformatory force. It remained for Ritson, with his eccentricities, his abusive manner, his violent language, and his reiterative insistence on honesty, to stimulate the attention of students of literature to such a degree that editorial laxity was generally discountenanced. It was because of Ritson's activity that Percy nursed the fourth edition of the 'Reliques' of much dross, and that Pinkerton confessed his dishonesty and pled for forgiveness. Ireland and Scott admittedly stood in awe of his

critical eye, and Ellis and Weber confessed themselves indebted to him for examples of faithful editing.¹⁾

In the field of popular poetry Ritson's influence was likewise considerable. The mere bulk of his poetic material outweighs that of any other man of his day. Half the total number of his volumes were collections of poems, songs, ballads, and romances, both English and Scottish. Although he confessed his failure to gather ballads from oral tradition, yet he rescued from possible destruction many a relic of antiquity by making accessible unknown or forgotten manuscripts and black letter copies. Not only did he increase the interest in popular poetry first aroused by Percy, but he inspired a veneration for the 'rude' remains of the past which was absent in the days of Percy and came to be thoroughly acknowledged only in those of Scott and Laing.

1. This was a preliminary, though a necessary, step to present-day 'critical' editing. For a concise statement of the evolution of editing from the exact reproduction of a single MS. through the 'eclectic' method to the 'critical', see Hammond, 'Chaucer': A Bibliographical Manual, 1908, pp. 106-13.

CHAPTER VII.

Prefatory Dissertations.

All of Ritson's publications have now been passed in review, and it remains to consider the historical essays which were prefixed to several of the collections.¹⁾ It was Ritson's purpose to give in each dissertation a historical review in chronological outline of the general subject of the collection which followed. Although the titles are various, the method of handling the material is quite uniform. Given a subject, say English or Scottish Song, Ritson gathered from remote poetic and historical sources, an astonishing number of references and allusions to it, and then strung them together in chronological sequence, with a minimum of editorial comment. It was his declared purpose to 'discover fact, not to indulge conjecture', and it was matter of pride to him that he made no statement without citing for it an old authority, either printed or manuscript. Because he considered it the business of the historian simply to give his material as he found it and not to construct a philology^{so phly}, he rarely began an essay with a definite thesis to support, and he

1. 'English Songs', 1783: 'A historical essay on the origin and progress of national song.'

'Ancient Songs and Ballads', 1790: 'Observations on the ancient English minstrels': 'A dissertation on the songs, music, and vocal and instrumental performance of the ancient English.'

'Scottish Song', 1795: 'A historical essay on Scottish Song.'

'Ancient English Metrical Romances', 1802: 'A dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy.'

less frequently drew inferences, and never summarized his conclusions. He did not formally classify his material outside the single essays, yet the substance of all of them falls not unnaturally into two divisions: minstrel and ballads; scottish poetry and ~~H~~istory. In dealing with the latter subject he took issue with Pinkerton's theories; in treating of the former he was at variance with Percy.

The earliest formal treatise on the ancient English minstrels was Percy's 'Essay', published in the original edition of the 'Reliques', 1765, and reprinted without material alteration in the second and third editions, 1767, 1775. Percy defined the minstrels to be 'an order of men in the Middle Ages, who united the arts of poetry and music, and sung verses to the harp of their own composing.' By means of a wealth of quotations from English and continental sources he pictured the minstrels as a society of men in high repute, having free access to the homes of the nobility and the great, and to the courts of kings. They were represented as musicians, as singers, and as poets; often as all three in one. The Anglo-Saxon minstrel was given an exalted character, almost equal to that of the Scandanavian Skald; and for ages after the Conquest the English minstrels were declared to be persons of honor and renown.

Percy's minstrel theory was first challenged by Ritson in his 'Essay on national song', where he flatly contradicted almost every claim to honor which the Bishop had made for the minstrels. Only a few historical references were adduced in this

essay, but Ritson again took up the subject and treated it at some length in the 'Observations on the Ancient English minstrels'. He there set himself to answer the question: 'Whether at any time, since the Norman conquest, there has existed a distinct order of Englishmen, who united the arts of poetry and music, and got their livelihood by singing to the harp verses in their native tongue of their own composing.' He ignored the Anglo-Saxon period because he considered it impossible to obtain reliable data concerning it. His aversion to Geoffrey of Monmouth, 1) whom Percy had frequently cited in the early part of his essay, led him to declare that even the mere existence of minstrels in England prior to the eleventh century, was wholly conjectural. Nevertheless, the allusions which Percy gathered from Tacitus, Bede and the Saxon Chronicle, as well as from Geoffrey, create a strong presumption in favor of his theory. Little has since been added to our stock of information concerning the Anglo-Saxon minstrel, - and perhaps nothing with historical authentication; and Percy's theory remains as a highly probable conjecture. 2)

In taking up the subject at the time of the Conquest Ritson's first step was the very essential one of distinguishing the various terms which Percy had taken over from the French and indiscriminately massed together under the name minstrel. 'Under this term', says the critic, 'we are to include the 'trouvère' or

1. See ante p.198 ff. -

2. The best treatment of the English Minstrels is that given by Chambers in the first four chapters of 'The Medieval Stage', Oxford, 1903. Other English books on the subject are unsatisfactory. An excellent bibliography of French and German works is given by Chambers.

poet, the 'chanteur' or vocal performer, and the 'ménétrier' or musician; not to mention the 'fablier', 'conteur', 'jongleur', 'baladin', etc. all which were sometimes distinct professions, and sometimes united in one and the same man.'¹⁾ Although Guiraut de Riquier,²⁾ five centuries before Ritson, had protested against the confusion arising from the indiscriminate grouping of the various classes of entertainers, Percy persistently refused to differentiate them. He declared that, 'it equally throws light upon the general history of the profession to show what favor or encouragement was given, at any particular period of time, to any one branch of it.'³⁾

Acting on the distinction which he had made, Ritson first of all separated the English from the French and Norman minstrels. It was the latter, he maintained, whom Percy had described as a respectable society with free entrance to the homes of the nobility. The English minstrels, he declared, were not a respectable society, if a society at all. They were only rude singers to the vulgar and illiterate, and had no opportunity to appear at Court or in the houses of the nobility, because there only French was spoken, and English despised.

From the absence of reference by historians or by the English minstrels to themselves as composers, Ritson concluded that they, unlike the French minstrels who constantly refer to them-

1. 'Ancient Songs and Ballads', I.p.ii,n. See also 'Ancient English Metrical Romances', I.p.79.

2. See Chambers, I.63.

3. 'Reliques', 4th edition, Everyman series, I.50.

2

selves in their songs, did not compose, but only sang and played. 'They could sing and play; but it was none of their business to read and write.'¹⁾ Ritson's evidence is probable, not conclusive. In rebuttal Percy maintained, with much plausibility, that 'by proving that minstrels were singers of the old romantic songs, romances, etc, we have in effect proved them to have been the makers at least of some of them.'²⁾ But Ritson carried his restrictions a step further and limited the function of the minstrels to playing on musical instruments, - a conjecture that is open to grave doubt. From the medieval glossarists, from the early chroniclers, from 'Piers Plowman', and from the Mysteries, he extracted passages in which 'minstrel' was used interchangeably with 'fiddler'. But the critic himself does not seem to be wholly assured on this point, for he elsewhere admits that the minstrels went up and down the country singing ballads and rude songs to the accompaniment of their musical instruments. However, he is assured of the utter degradation of the English minstrels, and of their rapid decline in the eyes of the law. The extinction of minstrelsy, if not of the minstrels, came in the age of Elizabeth as a result of religious restrictions, and of legal enactments made necessary by the large number of men who continually sought refuge for vagabondage under the guise of minstrels. As a fitting postlude to his

1. 'English Songs', I.p.lxviii.

2. 'Reliques', 4th.ed.,I.60.

account of their services, Ritson quotes the following satire by Dr. Bull:

When Jesus went to Jairus house,
Whose daughter was about to dye,
He turn'd the minstrels out of doors,
Among the rascal company:
Beggars they are with one consent,
And Rogues, by act of parliament. 1)

In the fourth edition of the 'Reliques' Percy revised his essay to a considerable extent, and profited by Ritson's criticisms. Although he nowhere mentions his opponent by name, he expressly states that 'in consequence of objections respecting the English minstrels after the Conquest (the latter) part (of the essay) hath been much enlarged, and additional light thrown upon the subject: which, to prevent cavil, hath been extended to minstrelsy in all its branches, as it was established in England, whether by natives or foreigners.' 2) Finding it impossible to distinguish between English and French minstrels (as Ritson had demanded) and still maintain his thesis throughout, Percy altered the title of the essay to read: 'The ancient minstrels in England.' 3) Declaring that he had 'readily corrected any mistakes which have been proved to be in this Essay', because he was 'wedded to no hypothesis', he also changed his definition of minstrels to comply with Ritson's criticism. It now read: 'an order of men in the Middle Ages, who

1. 'Ancient Songs', I. p. xvi, n.

2. 'Reliques' 4th. ed., p. 64.

3. I have not seen this point noted, but it is significant because it shows that Percy conceded to Ritson practically half the point at issue. Schroer, in his edition of the 'Reliques', 1889, collated the first four editions, but as I have not yet seen this I have been under the necessity of making my own collation.

subsisted by the arts of poetry and music, and sang to the harp verses composed by themselves, or others.' But, while the Bishop conceded a good deal to Ritson by admitting that the English minstrels were, perhaps, properly speaking, 'subordinate members of the college', and by qualifying many of his remarks on their exalted station, yet he persisted in considering them poets as well as musicians, and continued the uncritical method of employing semi-synonymous terms without discriminating among them. Ritson examined Percy's revised essay carefully and made reply to it in the 'Dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy', 1802. There he exulted with unseemly delight over the alterations which the Bishop had made as a result of his criticisms,¹) and filled his pages with additional proofs of the points already advanced.

It is now apparent that the issue between Percy and Ritson was a dual one: what was the social status of the English minstrels - were they honored and respected, or were they rogues and vagabonds? what was their literary status - were they merely musicians and singers, or were they composers as well? Percy answered both questions by giving to the minstrels the most elevated rank in both literary and social spheres: Ritson, by giving them the lowest. The crux of the whole disagreement lay in the refusal of both men to recognize the coeval existence of two grades or classes of minstrels. The distinction once clearly made between the English and Norman minstrels, Ritson was correct in considering the

1. Wheatley ignores this last Essay and labors under the impression that the 'Essay on the ancient English minstrels', 1790, was Ritson's reply to Percy's revisions in the 4th. edition of the 'Reliques', 1794. See 'Reliques' ed. H.B.Wheatley, 1876, I.430.

former as an inferior society. There can be little, if any, doubt that the Anglo-Saxon types were submerged by the Norman minstrels, and in the centuries immediately following the Conquest were in disrepute; and that they had access to the homes of the nobility or the court only when in the company of French minstrels. 1) But if this distinction is not made - if the subject for discussion is the 'Ancient minstrels in England' and not the 'Ancient English minstrels' 2) - it is legitimate to consider a class of men of high rank and renown. The difficulty lay in not realizing that this two-fold classification runs through the whole history of minstrelsy. The merging of the *mimus* and *scop* of Roman and Teutonic tradition was never quite complete, but a new distinction based largely on the old difference came to be well established in England by the second quarter of the fourteenth century. 3) Both Percy and Ritson were treating of the same period of time, 4) but

1. A roll of payments made on the occasion of a Whitsuntide feast held in London in 1396 records many minstrels by name. The list is headed by five minstrels with the title 'le roy'; next come a number said to be in the employ of this or that reverend or noble guest at the feast. These have French names. Lastly comes a large number of inferior minstrels, 'les autres menestrels de la commune', and some of these seen to have been of English birth.- Chambers, I. 47.

2. The difference in the title of his Essay made by Percy in the first and fourth editions.

3. See Chambers, vol. I. Bk. 1. 'Minstrelsy'.

4. DeQuincey, 'Homer and the Homeridae', in 'Works', ed. Masson, 1896, VI. 23, says of the point at issue between Percy and Ritson: 'The contradiction lay in the time: Percy and Ritson were speaking of different periods: the Bishop of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries - the attorney of the sixteenth and seventeenth'. But this is a misconception of the facts.

of different classes of men in it. As a result, each of the disputants had hold of 'only a bare half of the truth', yet each succeeded in illustrating his half with historical, legal, and poetical references such as would not, perhaps, otherwise have been brought together for many years. It was not a barren logomachy in which they were engaged. Modern writers on the subject confess that there is little fact to be added to the stock accumulated by these pioneers, but that it only remains for them to place the two halves side by side and make the necessary adjustments in order to come at the whole truth.

On the second point - the literary status of the minstrels - there was scarcely less divergence of opinion. Percy considered them composers as well as singers. While it was generally recognized that the English minstrels translated and adapted many of the romances brought over by the French, he held that in some cases the tables were turned and the French made versions of native English minstrel songs. 'Richard Cour de Lion' and 'Eger and Grime', from the use of native names he considered of genuine English growth, and this view is held by the editors of the folio manuscript.¹⁾ Ritson, on the contrary, did not believe the minstrels sufficient to account for minstrelsy. Granting to them neither education nor culture it was absurd to think of the minstrels as the authors of fabulous narratives several thousand lines in length. Though they could neither read nor write, yet they could sing what men of genius had composed or translated for them.

1. See 'Percy's Folio MS.', I. 341 ff.

Ritson does not state who he thinks these 'men of genius' were, but he says there is nothing about the romances themselves to preclude the view that they were written by 'a monk in his cell' or a 'priest in his closet'.¹⁾ While denying Percy's thesis that the English minstrels composed romances, he did not contend that there were none of native English growth. ''Eglamour',²⁾ 'Trimour',³⁾ 'the squyre of lowe degree', and it may be one or two more, of which no French originals are known, may be fairly concluded to be of English invention; but', he said, 'it is absolutely impossible that this can be the case with 'Guy', 'Bevis', or the rest, of which these originals are extant.'⁴⁾ With scant justice Ritson doubted the probability of these famous romances, the French manuscripts of which are superior to the English and antedate them by one, two, or even three centuries, having been originally composed on English soil though in the French language. Indeed, he carried his iconoclasm so far as to deny the Arabian, Scandinavian, and Provençal theories of the origin of ~~the~~ romance, without substituting any definite system in their stead. All of these he rejected because they were largely conjectural, there being not sufficient fact to support a theory. But his own proposal was

1. 'Metrical Romances', I.57.

2. 'There is a secret history attached to the source of this romance yet to be unravelled' - Halliwell, ed. 'Sir Eglamour of Artôis', for Camden Society, 1844.

3. Nothing of the source of this romance is given by Hales and Furnivall, nor by Halliwell who edited it for the Percy Society, 1846.

4. 'Metrical Romances', I.51.

equally conjectural. 'After all', he said, 'it seems highly probable that the origin of romance in every age or country is to be sought in the different systems of superstition which have from time to time prevailed, whether pagan or Christian.'¹) While this theory contains a large element of truth, Ritson pushed it too far in denying historical basis to the romances. Their heroes are not historical characters, he declared: 'they are mere creatures of the imagination and only obtain an establishment in history because it was usually written upon the authority of romance.'²)

Ritson's disrespect of the English minstrels was thoroughgoing. Not only did he rate them as rogues and vagabonds, deny them the ability to read and write, and limit their activities to 'twanging on the harp', but he characterized their songs as rude and barbarous. Sydney's 'blind crowder with no rougher voice than rude style',³) was the typical minstrel for Ritson, and his music was happily described by Puttenham: 'your ordinary rimers use very much their measures in the odd, as nine and eleven, and the sharp accent upon the last syllable, which therefore makes him so ill-favoredly (and like a minstrel's music.'⁴) With the coming into favor of the ballad singer in the age of Elizabeth, Ritson noted a corresponding decrease of interest in the entertainment furnished by the minstrels. These were undoubtedly contemporaneous events, but a casual connection would be more difficult to

1. Ibid, I.19.

2. Ibid, I.50.

3. 'Defense of Poetry', ed. Cook, 1890, p.29.

4. 'The Art of English Poetry', Bk.I. Chap. IV. Ed. Arber, 1869, p.25.

establish than Ritson seems to think. It is his opinion that the ballad singers, with their simple melodies, soon drew all attention from the wild and licentious meter of the minstrels, and caused them in sheer self-defense to adopt ballad tunes. But he does not, as Gummere states, 'think the feeble ballads of Deloney better than Chevy Chase.'¹⁾ What he does say is that the old Chevy Chase is inferior in simplicity, nature, pathos, and melody to such ballads as 'Fair Rosamond', 'John Dory', 'Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard', 'Children in the Wood' etc.²⁾ But he did not fall into the error of considering these ballads as ancient as the minstrel songs: 'Those pieces which we now call old ballads, are comparatively modern, that is, of the latter end of the sixteenth century.' And he adds: 'Our most ancient popular ballads, if we may judge from the few specimens preserved, were singularly rude.'³⁾ Both Ritson's taste and judgment were in advance of his age; and in ballads his taste seldom lagged behind his judgment.

Ritson was a genuine admirer of the old popular ballad. He it was who first clearly differentiated song and ballad and gave the prevailing definition of ballad as a lyrical narrative.⁴⁾ With the true instinct of the ballad lover, he declared that the genuine pieces of this species were not to be sought in the works

1. 'Old English Ballads', 1894, p.xxvi.

2. 'Ancient Songs', p.xxxiii-iv.

3. Ibid, p.c.

4. 'English Songs', 1867, i. Motherwell, in 'Minstrelsy, ancient and modern', 1827, Preface p.i.; and Gummere, in 'Old English Ballads', p.xxvi, give Ritson credit for the first clear-cut definition of ballad.

of Hamilton, Thomson, Smollet, or even Ramsay: but in the productions of obscure and anonymous authors, of shepherds and milk maids, who actually felt the sensations they describe; of those, in short, who were destitute of all the advantages of science and education, and perhaps incapable of committing the pure inspirations of nature to writing.¹⁾ On the subject of ballad authorship he says nothing further; but from this statement and his remarks on the origin of minstrelsy we can judge pretty closely what his attitude would have been. He would have espoused the theory of individual authorship, and scouted that of communal origin. The 'Composing folk' would have vanished into nothingness under his uncompromising demand for historical authentication.

On the preservation of ballads by oral tradition Ritson spoke more definitely. It was his belief^e that there yet remained in his own day many pieces of the true type current in the oral tradition of Scotland. He had made several unsuccessful attempts to take them down from recitation; but his own failure did not cause him to deny that other persons, perhaps possessing greater tact, had been more fortunate. But he professed himself to be an incompetent judge of the antiquity and genuineness of many of the pieces published as 'from tradition'. Where he had not an ancient manuscript as a guide, he was almost lost. In such a case he confessed that his judgment was necessarily based on one or both of the following tests: the irregular style, and the pathetic

1. 'Scottish Songs', I. p.lxxix.

simplicity of the genuine ballad. If judiciously applied, these tests would not often lead one astray. However, of one principle Ritson was very certain, viz., that oral transmission alters and tends always to degrade its material. 'Obsolete phrases', he says, 'will be perpetually changing for those better understood, and what the memory loses the invention must supply. So that a performance of genius and merit, as the purest stream becomes polluted by the foulness of its channel, may in time be degraded to the vilest jargon. Tradition, in short, is a species of alchemy which converts gold into lead.'¹) As an example of the transforming power of tradition he compared a popular version of 'The Wee Wee Man' with a fourteenth century manuscript which he erroneously considered to be its original.²) With rare critical insight he remarked that the effect of tradition was 'degrading' only to the form, to the words, but not to the substance of the ballad - that remained unaltered. While the 'description and sentiment' remained the same, the 'expressions and allusions' fluctuated with the times and communities through which they passed, so that no single piece was preserved in oral tradition exactly as it had been originally composed. The advocates of oral tradition in Percy's

1. 'Scottish Songs', I.p.lxxx1.

2. Child prints the fourteenth century manuscript in an appendix. He remarks that this poem stands in somewhat the same relation to the ballad of the 'Wee Wee Man' as the poem of Thomas of Ercaldoune does to the ballad of Thomas Rymer, 'but with the important difference that there is no reason for deriving the ballad from the poem in this instance' - Child, I.329 (No.38). Although this example does not illustrate Ritson's point as he intended it should yet his deductions concerning the general effect of oral transmission are sound.

day, and especially the Ossianic enthusiasts insisted that every piece current in the mouth of the folk was sung exactly as it had been composed. On this point Ritson remarked in conclusion: "Had the 'Canterbury Tales' of Chaucer been preserved to the present time in the same manner, there would not have remained one single word which had fallen from the pen of that venerable bard: they would have been as completely, though not quite so elegantly, modernized, as they are by Dryden and Pope: and yet it is pretended that the poems of Ossian have been preserved immaculate for more than athousand years.'1)

Ritson displayed a sincere love for the reliques of antiquity, and an ardor in collecting and preserving the rude remains of the past. He repeatedly urged the publication of ballads and minstrel songs, and declared that one of his highest ambitions in making his own collections was to inspire others of a like nature.²⁾ However, he insisted that these collections should be made scientifically, and with absolute fidelity to originals, whether oral or written. But students of popular poetry in Ritson's day were not accustomed to apply a stern critical faculty or a cold judgment, to ballads and romances. To these they preferred to apply the test of feeling or taste. Percy gave the first noteworthy example of this method in the 'Reliques'; and here again Ritson joined issue with him. The critic's disgust with Percy's

1. Ibid, I. lxxxii.

2. See 'Ancient Songs', I.p.ciii: 'Scotish Songs', I. p.cxix; and Prefaces to all his collections.



manner of handling his professedly ancient material led him quite early to question the very existence of the Folio manuscript. On Ritson's conduct in this matter there has been much half-informed writing, 1) and it will not be impertinent to review his comments.

The first published evidence of Ritson's doubt as to the existence of the famous manuscript occurs in the 'Observations' on Warton, 1782 (p.11): 'You say you think you have somewhere seen a romance in verse, entitled, 'The Turke and Gawaine'. The Bishop of Dromore says he has it in his Folio MS. Did you ever see **THAT?**' This ironical challenge, in its self, simply implies doubt of Warton's having seen the manuscript, not of its reality. The next statement expresses doubt, but not yet denial of its authenticity. He is commenting, in the 'Remarks' on Shakespeare, 1783 (p.167) on the 'unreasonable practise' of commentators in referring their readers to scarce books which it is virtually impossible for them ever to see. Percy has here made reference to the poem of 'John the Reeve', and Ritson remarks: 'never was this absurdity carried to such an extent of mockery as it is in the present instance;

1. See Surtees, 'History of Durham', III.193 ff.; Dibdin, 'Decameron', III.338 ff.; and Park's notes in second edition of 'English Songs', 1813. Pickford writes: 'Ritson denied the existence of the manuscript: it is said in order to refute this charge, the fine portrait of Percy, painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, had, in compliance with his own request, the disputed manuscript Folio placed in his hand, in order to show that it had an actual existence.' Life of Percy in Hales and Furni^{va}ll edition of the Folio manuscript, I. p.xlvii. The portrait here referred to was painted in May, 1773 (See the general Introduction of Hales and Furni^{va}ll, p. liii) and Ritson's earliest comment on the manuscript appeared late in 1782.

where the learned nrelate very cooly orders us to inspect a poem, only extant, as he is well assured, and has elsewhere told us, in a certain Folio MS. in his own possession, which, perhaps, no one ever saw, and which (if it really exist) he will, for his own sake, take effectual care that no one else shall see.' In a second publication of the year 1783, Ritson remarked with great justice that the genuineness of the pieces in the 'Reliques' 'cannot be properly investigated or determined without an inspection of the original manuscript from which they are said to be extracted.'¹⁾ This was one of the earliest, if not the very first, demand upon Percy to publish his manuscript. But requests and threats and demands were to be equally unavailing for nearly a century.

Some time after these attacks Percy began to exercise himself to convince Ritson of his error. He asked J.C. Walker, a mutual friend, to undertake the task of convincing the critic of the existence of the manuscript. Walker wrote to Ritson, and told Percy that in doing so, 'I had little more to do than to transcribe your Lordship's letter, changing as I proceeded, the second to the first person.'²⁾ Walker was not far wrong in his conjecture that he had 'opened Ritson's eyes'. The critic replied immediately 'as a publication of uncommon elegance and poetical merit I have always been, and still am, a warm admirer of Bishop Percy's 'Reliques', and although I have been persuaded that he has not on every occasion been so scrupulously attentive to his originals as

1. 'English Songs', I. p.lxxvi.

2. Walker to Percy, Sept. 22, 1789, 'Literary Illustrations', VII, 710.

I think the work required, I shall be very glad to find the idea unfounded, and readily confess that what you have been so obliging as to tell me about the Folio MS. has in a great measure removed my prejudice on that head. The limits of a letter will not permit me to enter fully into the discussion of a question upon which I believe a good deal may be said. In the course of some prefatory matter to a book which ought to have come out two or three years ago, but which I hope to receive and have the pleasure of transmitting to you in a short time, you will perceive the grounds upon which I have ventured to doubt the authenticity or at least the fidelity of this celebrated publication.'¹⁾

Walker at once communicated the substance of this letter to Percy with the comment: 'Thus have I, without a breach of confidence, opened Mr. Ritson's mind to your Lordship.'²⁾

The publication to which Ritson referred in the letter just quoted was 'Ancient Songs and Ballads', 1790. In the Preface he acknowledged his error: 'The existence of this MS., if ever questioned, is now placed beyond the possibility of a doubt. But!', he significantly adds, 'it appears to have suffered much by ill usage.' He cites a dozen poems in which 'the learned collector has preferred his ingenuity to his fidelity, without the least intimation to the reader.' From the great number of such in-

1. 'Letters', I. 152. Nov. 4, 1789.

2. Walker to Percy, Nov. 7, 1789, 'Lit. Illust.', VII. 711. Later Percy accused Walker of lukewarmness, and said his conduct reflected on his moral character. This was because Walker remained in the good graces of Ritson and was mentioned with praise in the Preface to 'Scottish Songs'. Walker answered Percy that he had convinced Ritson of the existence of the manuscript, but was unable

stances in the 'Reliques' he concludes that 'no confidence can be placed in any of the 'old minstrel ballads' inserted in that collection, and not to be found elsewhere.'¹⁾ With perfect candor he admitted that he had no objection to Percy's filling out the defective pieces with verses of his own; but with advanced ideals of editing he insisted that the new should have been clearly distinguished from the old. Percy defended many of his errors by his distant removal from the press at the time of printing, and Ritson, with his usual keenness, suggested that he 'would perceive the justice of confining this excuse to the first edition.'²⁾

Percy's friends now became interested in his defense. Pinkerton outlined a statement of the authenticity of the manuscript, which was to be signed by a number of prominent literary men, and he suggested that the manuscript itself be deposited in a public place for inspection. To this Percy would not consent, exclaiming: 'This was the very end to which Mr. Ritson has been driving. . . . But he shall be disappointed: the manuscript shall never be exposed to his sight in my lifetime; and, as I have no other resource, I hope yet to procure some respectable family name, that may be generously interposed as a shield, before one whom the assailant knows to be incapable, from the peculiarities of his

to persuade him further until he could, by an inspection of the MS., verify his own conviction that the Bishop had 'dropped no unacknowledged flowers' in the 'Reliques'. Walker to Percy, Spring 1794. 'Literary Illustrations', VII.725.

1. 'Ancient Songs', I. p.xxix ff.

2. Ritson to Walker, January 1, 1790, 'Literary Illustrations', VII.725.

situation, of self-defense.¹⁾ The manuscript was accordingly deposited for nearly a year at the house of Nichols, the printer, while the fourth edition of the 'Reliques' was passing through the press. It was inspected by Barrington, Cracherode, Farmer, Steevens, Malone, and Reed, whose names are appealed to in the Advertisement to that edition in support of the description of the manuscript there given.²⁾ Of these men, at least Steevens, and perhaps others, while convinced of the existence of the manuscript and of its correspondence with the printed copy in one or two particular ballads which he had examined carefully, could not be brought to subscribe to the veracity of the 'Reliques' as a whole.³⁾ Ritson himself had long since given over all idea of denying the existence of the manuscript: but Percy and his friends continued to remark on this point with the apparent object of drawing attention from the critic's more pertinent and less easily answered objections to the way in which it had been handled.

In the dissertation on 'Romance and Minstrelsy' prefixed to 'Ancient English Metrical Romances', 1802, occurs Ritson's final judgment on the 'Reliques'. It may be repeated that he nowhere disputes the existence of the manuscript 'in its present

1. Percy to Pinkerton, July 28, 1792, 'Pinkerton Correspondence', I.317-9. See also, Ibid, I.355. Contrast with the sentiment of the above letter the statement that prior to Ritson's attack, Percy had intended to bequeath his Folio manuscript to him, 'thinking as he himself owned, it could not be in better hands.' Gentleman's Magazine, 95.i.486-8. The authority for this assertion is doubtful.

2. Park is in error in stating, 'English Songs', I.n.lxxvi, note, that Ritson had it in his power to inspect the manuscript at this time. See Percy's declaration of hostility, above.

3. See Nares to Percy, Dec. 28, 1804, 'Literary Illustrations', VII.606-7; and British Critic, Jan. 1805.

mutilated and miserable condition'; but he still insists that Percy has 'fairly and honestly printed scarcely one single poem, song, or ballad' from it. In justification of this judgment, antithetical as it was to the prevailing opinion, he summarized, in equally revolutionary terms, his conception of an editor's function. 'To correct the obvious errors of an illiterate transcriber, to supply irremediable defects, and to make sense of nonsense, are certainly essential duties of an editor of ancient poetry, provided he act with integrity and publicity; but secretly to suppress the original text, and insert his own fabrications for the sake of providing more refined entertainment for readers of taste and genius, is no proof of either judgment, candor, or integrity.'¹) Then he printed 'The Marriage of Sir Gawaine', placing the 'amended' copy from the first edition of the 'Reliques' by the side of the 'original' as given in the fourth, and designating by different type Percy's additions. The contrast brought out by this method was only intensified, and Ritson's generalization as to the faulty character of the whole work, was verified by the Hales and Furnivall edition of the Folio manuscript sixty-five years later. 'The purchasers and perusers of such a collection are deceived and imposed upon', Ritson declared; 'the pleasure they receive is derived from the idea of antiquity, which, in fact, is perfect illusion.'

Percy's defense of his method was that 'the rudeness of the more obsolete poems', and 'the tediousness of the longer

1. 'Metrical Romances', p. 70.

narratives', must be atoned for by 'little elegant pieces of the lyric kind', in order for them to appeal to 'a polished age like present.'¹⁾ And modern critics and historians of literature, following his lead, declare with one accord that the plan pursued was the only one which would have insured a kindly reception to these rude remains of antiquity. But Ritson counselled thus: 'If the ingenious editor had published all his imperfect poems by correcting the blunders of puerility or inattention, and supplying the defects of barbarian ignorance, with proper distinction of type, it would not only have gratified the austere antiquary, but also provided refined entertainment for every reader of taste and genius.'²⁾ This simple device seems not to have suggested itself to any one of the critics of the last century. They are accustomed to consider the revival of interest in popular poetry, along with other romantic manifestations, as largely an emotional growth which would have been killed, or indefinitely retarded, by the introduction of the purely intellectual and critical. But it is at least an open question whether the mere distinction of type, suggested by Ritson, would not have left the immediate effects of the 'Reliques' substantially the same: and there can be no doubt that many a genuine ancient piece would have been preserved, and

1. Preface to 'Reliques'.

2. 'Metrical Romances', I. p. 70.

that the famous and valuable folio manuscript would have been given to the world of scholarship in its primitive state a century earlier.¹⁾

The eighteenth century interest in popular poetry had its inception in ingenious but reprehensible deception. Ritson was the avowed enemy of forgery and literary deception, and as the champion of candor and integrity he did more than any other one man of his day to hasten the scientific study of popular poetry. On the publication of Pinkerton's 'Select Scottish Ballads,' 1783,²⁾ which professed to be 'now first published from tradition in their original perfection', Ritson demonstrated in a letter to the Gentleman's Magazine,³⁾ that 'The laird of Woodhouslie', 'Lord Livingston', 'Binnorie', 'The death of Menteith', 'I wish I were where Helen lies', the second part of 'Hardyknute', and two pretended fragments, were 'artful and impudent forgeries'. Although Pinkerton was allowed, through the singular conduct of the editor of the Gentleman's , to print a denial of Ritson's charges before

1. It may be asserted that a comparison of the popular reception of the 'Reliques' and any one of Ritson's collections would be a sufficient test of this argument. It cannot be denied that Percy's interpolations and additions contributed greatly to the popularity of his work. The question is, would it have been ^{so} popular with the new distinguished from the old in some simple and unobtrusive manner? Ritson's collections could never have been such general favorites as the 'Reliques' because he lacked the Bishop's poetic gift. Had either of them possessed the excellencies of both, the scholar and the general reader would have been equally served.

2. Originally, 'Scottish Tragic Ballads', 1781.

3. Letter signed 'Anti-Scot', Gentleman's Magazine, 54.ii.812-14.

before his letter was published, and although he took counsel of friends 1) as to how he should dispose of his calumniator, yet in 'Ancient Scottish Poems', 1786, he confessed and pled for forgiveness, urging in extenuation of his crime, youth and a laudable desire to please the public. 2) But with this expression of penitence did not go an altered conduct which should accompany a true change of heart. He continued to insert his own productions in 'ancient' collections, meanwhile making a display of honesty by censuring, with poor grace indeed, other men who had practised deception. 3)

Pinkerton again became involved with Ritson in 1792, when in his 'Scottish Poems', he printed an imperfect version of 'Sir Cavan and Sir Galeron of Galloway.' This was from a manuscript of John Baynes, which fell to Ritson in 1787, who then refused Pinkerton's request to publish it. In spite of his promise that it

1. Walpole advised Pinkerton to make a firm denial of the charges but by no means to display anger. 'Pinkerton Correspondence', I. 87.

2. Ritson afterward gave it as his opinion that 'had this letter never appeared these contemptible forgeries would have continued to disgrace the annals of Scottish poetry, till, at least, the pretence of antiquity had proved too slight a buoy to support the weight of their intrinsic dulness.' 'Scottish Songs', I. p. lxxvi, n. This was not the only error of which Pinkerton was convinced by Ritson. Sent. 4, 1794 he wrote to Percy: 'I must confess myself thoroughly convinced that Minstrel only implied musician, and was never used for a bard, maker, or poet: were I reprinting any former production in this way I would retract all my opinions to the contrary, though often repeated.' After suggesting a rearrangement of Percy's Essay to distinguish the Minstrel proper from the poets and reciters, he adds: 'Even granting all the passages cited in your favor, you must contend against hundreds on the opposite side. For a part, Ritson's book may be referred to.' Gentleman's Magazine, 102. ii. 125.

3. See his inconsistent censure of Ramsay in Preface to 'Select Scottish Ballads'; and his abuse of those ^{who} believed in the authenticity of 'Ossian', in his 'Inquiry'. ^

should not be used, Pinkerton printed the romance, and was scathingly rebuked for his perfidy in a communication to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, written by Ritson.¹⁾ Pinkerton achieved his revenge for this letter in a violent^{ly} denunciatory review of Ritson's 'Scottish Songs' in 1795.²⁾ This brought no public response from Ritson, though he remarked to friends³⁾ on its 'falsehood, impudence, and scurrility.' He said of Pinkerton, as Dr. Johnson of Goldsmith, 'he only stumbles on truth by accident'; and he considered it 'a thousand pities that John Pinkerton had not flourished in the age, and enjoyed the friendship of Geoffrey of Monmouth; that he might have certified, with his sacred signature, the integrity and truth of the original manuscript of that veracious historian, as he did the no less genuine 'Shakespeariana', of William Ireland.'⁴⁾

Ritson's attack was undoubtedly intensified by Pinkerton's nationality. To Scotchmen he entertained an aversion as pronounced as that of Dr. Johnson. He lost no opportunity to satirize the Scotch, although he spent much labor and money in illustrating the antiquities of the North. His letters abound in sarcastic flings: 'I dread a Scotchman bringing ancient verses'⁵⁾; 'shoals of

1. See *Gentleman's Magazine*, 63, 33. January, 1793. Ritson complained to Harrison, February 14, 1793, that 'the scoundrel of an editor had the impertinence to omit the best part of my letter.' 'Letters', II.10. A note in Douce's hand on the original manuscript, now Douce 324, Bodleian, supports Ritson's contention that Pinkerton printed the romance 'in direct violation of his promise.'

2. *Critical Review*, January, 1795.

3. 'Letters', II.67, 75.

4. 'The Life of King Arthur', n. xviii, note.

5. 'Letters', I.186.

Scotchmen are arriving (in London) every day; the difficulty, I should imagine, would be to find one going back':1) 'either accuracy or integrity is pretty extraordinary in a Scotchman':2) 'A Scotchman in a passion must necessarily be a very ferocious and dangerous animal.'3) But he was not insensible to the virtues of the Scottish people, and on one occasion wrote: 'I must candidly acknowledge that I have found amiable and excellent qualities in Edinburgh, for which, I am afraid, a Scotch man must seek long and perhaps ineffectually, in this gigantic metropolis. They say that 'Out of the North cometh forth evil'; is that the reason so much good remains behind?'4)

Ritson's most vigorous pronouncement on the weakness of the Scottish character appeared in his 'Essay on Scottish Song'. There he proposes as a subject of investigation for the new Royal Society, 'Why the Scotch literati should be more particularly addicted to literary imposition than those of any other country.' That they are, Ritson does not doubt. He agrees with Johnson that 'a Scotchman must be a very sturdy moralist who does not love Scotland more than truth.' Of the love of falsehood rather than of truth, he considers the many literary impostures perpetrated by Scotchmen, as incontrovertible evidence. 'The forgeries of Hector Boethius, David Chalmers, George Buchanan, Thomas Dempster, Sir

1. Ibid, II.9
2. Ibid, II.30
3. Ibid, II.35.
4. Ibid, II.142.

John Bruce, William Lauder, Archibald Bower, James Macpherson, and John Pinkerton, stamp a disgrace upon the national character, which ages of exceptionless integrity will be required to remove: an era, however, which, if one may judge from the detestation in which the most infamous and despicable of these impostors is universally held, has already commenced.¹⁾ This characterization of Scotland as the breeding place of literary forgeries, and of himself as the most notorious of the malefactors, Pinkerton undertook to refute.²⁾ His argument is beside the point, for his sole defense is that other nations have been equally guilty. That the impostures listed by Ritson were a national disgrace, he could not gainsay.

In calling attention to the prevalence of literary deception in Scotland, and in condemning Pinkerton for his falsehoods, Ritson was only pushing forward his campaign for truth and candor in all editorial dealings. And because it was done with his customary violence and lack of restraint, his manner has attracted attention while his beneficent service has been ignored. But he was something more than a mere caviller. His strictures on faulty editorial methods were not without their effect, and were of value in proportion as they cleared the way for critical and scholarly methods. A more immediately recognized service, because a more definitely constructive work, was rendered in his opposition to Pinkerton's 'Gothic System' of Scottish History.

1. 'Scottish Songs', I.lixiii. Ritson's personal contempt for Pinkerton may have misled his judgment in this last clause. Chalmers wrote to Constable, Oct. 27, 1803: 'there seems to be a Pinkerton mania in Scotland.' 'Constable's Literary Correspondence', I.411.

2. See review of 'Scottish Songs', in Critical Review.

Although the Scottish people had long considered themselves a very ancient nation, a true investigation of the original sources of their history was slow in making its appearance. In 1526 Hector Boethius, the Geoffrey of Scottish history, by embellishing the Chronicles of Fordun 1) and Andrew Wyntoun 2) and adding a list of fabulous kings, manufactured a historical development highly gratifying to the Scots of his and succeeding generations. Boethius was followed by Bishop Lesley, 3) and George Buchanan, 4) both of whom continued the list of imaginary kings. The antiquity of the Scots, and especially the veracity of this kingly chronology, were attacked by Robert O'Flaherty 5) in 1685, but the first considerable attempt to sift fact from tradition was that undertaken by the antiquary, Father Thomas Innes. 6) The service which he rendered was largely negative. He destroyed about half of the Scottish kings and winnowed out from the accented history much of the trash of tradition. A further step in this direction was taken by Sir David Dalrymple: 7) but the works of both these men were concerned only with the middle ages of Scottish

1. John Fordun, 'Chronica Gentis Scotorum', 1584(?).
2. 'Original cronykil of Scotland', 1406(?).
3. 'Historia Scotorum', 1582.
4. 'History of the Picts', 1572.
5. 'Ogria sen rerum Hibernicarum chronologia', London, 1685.
6. As an appendix to his 'Critical Essay on the ancient inhabitants of Scotland', 2 vols., London, 1729, he published some ancient chronicles and fragments of Scottish history.
7. 'Annals of Scotland, from the accession of Malcolm-III, surnamed Canmore, to the accession of Robert I.'; and 'Annals of Scotland from the accession of Robert I., surnamed the Bruce, to the accession of the house of Stuart,' 1776.

history. This left the very ancient times, the real source of all the misunderstanding of later ages, untouched so far as critical treatment was concerned.

The first to undertake an elucidation of this ancient period was Pinkerton. His 'Dissertation on the origin and progress of the Scythians or Goths, being an Introduction to the ancient and modern history of Europe', 1787, presents in somewhat general form the theory of the origin of the Scottish people which was developed more fully in his 'Inquiry into the history of Scotland preceding the reign of Malcolm III., or 1056, including the authentic history of that period'. 1790. Pinkerton brought to his task a wide but not a thorough knowledge of medieval history, and an undisguised contempt of other laborers in the field. He recognized the necessity of grounding his history on authentic records, although not many of them were accessible to him and he did not always use honestly those available. With characteristic egotism he declared of his 'Inquiry', some time before its publication: 'It is a work which will fix the ancient history of ~~my~~ country upon the firm basis of ancient authorities, that nothing can shake. Men of science and all lovers of truth I shall convince: as for the rest, *'si vulgus vult decipi, decipiatur!'*'^t 1) His work is ingenious, but its value was greatly impaired by an unreasoning aversion to the Celts and everything Celtic, and by the adoption of an erroneous theory concerning the 'Pix', as he persistently calls them.

1. Pinkerton to Percy, November 19, 1785, in *Gentleman's Magazine* 102.ii.121-2.

Pinkerton classified the ancient peoples of Scottish history under four divisions: the Celts, Britons, Picts, and Scots. According to his theory the Goths, originally Scythians, in the centuries before the Christian era came westward from the wilds of their native country and overran all northern Europe, subduing the original inhabitants and colonizing the territory. About the Christian era the Peukl tribe of the all-conquering Goths went from Scandinavia to northern England, where they conquered and all but annihilated the inferior Celts. The Celts were to the other inhabitants of Europe what the savages of America were to the European settlers there; and they remain to this day 'a dishonored timid, filthy, ignorant, and degraded race.' The Goths settled in the Lowlands of Scotland and were known to the Romans as Picts. They were subjugated by Agricola but later established a kingdom which spread over all Scotland. They were never conquered, but were united with the Scots, a Celtic tribe from Ireland, when Kenneth by marriage succeeded to the Pictish throne in 503 A.D. After that time the Scots became ^{the} significant, only giving their name to the kingdom. From 503 to the present day the Picts have continued supreme in the Lowlands. The Scottish vernacular of that section had its origin in the Teutonic dialect spoken by the Picts, or early invading Goths.

Pinkerton's theory did not go long unchallenged. Ritson attacked the earlier statement of it in a cursory fashion in the Essay prefixed to his 'Scottish Songs'. There he only denied the general hypothesis without going into detail, and charitably

ascribed to insanity Pinkerton's treatment of the Celts as a 'medial race between beasts and men.' But he did not wish to let the matter rest in this incomplete state. Upon the publication of Pinkerton's 'Inquiry' he was still more strongly convinced that 'a history of the Celts by a person of learning and industry is much wanted.' Knowing that John Lanne Buchanan had undertaken a reply to Pinkerton he awaited the appearance of his 'Defense of the Scots Highlanders in general and some learned characters in particular', 1794. But when this work proved to be what he had anticipated, 1) unscholarly and inadequate, he took up the subject of Scottish history himself. From 1795 until his death he spent much time in this field, but the results of his labor were not published during his lifetime. In 'Caledonia', 1807, George Chalmers 2) summarized the various systems of Scottish history up to his own day. He expressed his opposition to Pinkerton's theory but did not enter into a scientific examination of the evidence. It remained for Ritson to vindicate the Celts and to expose the

1. In anticipation of the publication of this book Ritson wrote to Paton, March 5, 1794: 'Pinkerton's treatment of the 'Celtic savages' is to be speedily resented in print by the Rev. John Lanne Buchanan. . . . who seems in fact, to be as very a Celt as his antagonist could possibly wish for. I am sorry to find so good a cause in the hands of such an incompetent advocate.' 'Letters', II.46.

2. Chalmers was by some thought to be the author of a review of Pinkerton's 'Inquiry' which appeared in the first number of the Edinburgh Review. Anticipating this he wrote to Constable, Oct. 27, 1803: 'I was surprized to learn from you that I should have been considered by anybody at Edinburgh to be the author of the Vindication of the Celts, which is so unlike anything that I ever wrote. If I had written on that subject, I would have beaten Pinkerton's brains out in one half the space. Pinkerton's Goths is a tissue of interpolation and falsehood, fiction and impertinence; but I have never published anything upon the matter.' Constable's 'Literary Correspondence', I.411.

fallacy of the Pictish origin of the modern Scottish dialect, in his 'Memoirs of the Celts', and 'Annals of the Caledonians', published in 1827-8.

In these volumes Ritson worked out no definite historical theory. Instead he followed his usual method of amassing and arranging in chronological order all the historical references and poetical allusions which he could gather from remote sources. With perfect candor he inserted in his collection every passage pertaining to the subject in hand, whether it supported his preconceived opinion or not; and all the transcriptions were made with scrupulous care. He had access to a wider range of ancient material than Pinkerton; his treatment of it was more scientific; and his results were correspondingly more accurate. Although he could not have anticipated the rapid advance which has since been made in ethnological and linguistic science, yet he presented a large body of the authentic material upon which modern theories are based. The advance which he made over Pinkerton and the degree of his approach to present-day theories will be revealed by a brief examination of the 'Memoirs' and 'Annals',

Ritson avowedly held a brief for the Celts,¹) With an astonishing array of evidence from scores of early writers he traces their movements on the continent. Instead of being an inferior and degraded race they were for several centuries before

1. Speaking very strictly, it is inaccurate to say that Ritson had no definite historical theory. He worked out none in logical sequence. However, the interpretation which he places upon his material may be gleaned from his footnotes and prefaces.

Christ the most powerful and numerous people in Europe. Eventually conquered by the Romans they became disintegrated and were gradually absorbed by the other nations. 'People of a Celtic race are yet to be found in Wales, Ireland, the north of Scotland, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, Armorica, and in a district of the Alps, called the Pais de Vaud.'¹⁾ The primitive language of the Celts, dialects of which were still spoken by the people in these districts, Ritson said was not Teutonic, although it bore evidences of relationship with Germanic. This was about all that could be said on the subject before the introduction of comparative philology. Modern ethnology has confirmed Ritson's thesis on the predominance of the early Celts, and has even denominated the time from the fifth to the third century before Christ, the 'Celtic period'.²⁾

The 'Annals of the Caledonians, Picts, and Scots: and of Strathclyde, Cumberland, Galloway, and Murray' is an attempt to give a chronological account of the early inhabitants of Caledonia from the most ancient and authentic documents. The main object of Ritson's labors here was to disprove Pinkerton's theory concerning the Teutonic origin of the Picts and the consequent influence of the Pictish tongue on the modern lowland Scottish: but at the same time he had opportunity to present further evidence of the importance of the Celts. From the testimony of Tacitus, Herodotus,

1. 'Memoirs of the Celts', Preface, p.x.

2. See Deniker, 'The Races of Men', 1910. p.317 ff. for a statement of modern views concerning the peoples of Europe, especially the Celts.



Caesar, Bede, and others it appears that the most ancient known inhabitants of the British Isles were the Celts,¹⁾ who had no doubt settled there in the great Celtic period. The first mention of the Picts is about 300 A.D. when they are referred to by Tacitus, Caesar, and others, as enemies to the Britons.²⁾ Coming as they did from the continent to Ireland and thence to Caledonia, Ritson concluded that they were originally Celts but by long separation from that branch of the race which had settled in Britain, had become a distinct nation and made war on their own kinsmen.³⁾ In 449 the South Britons called in the Saxons to aid them against the Picts and Scots, who were then driven into the north. The Scots, originally Irish, and admitted by Pinkerton to be Celts, contended with the Picts against the South Britons. When these two nations were forced back by the combined efforts of the Saxons and Britons they fell to warring among themselves, with the result that the Picts were overcome and all but annihilated. This in itself was fatal to Pinkerton's Celto-Gothic system. By a wilful perversion of history he declared that it was the Scots who were exterminated. But the Scots gave their name to the country and to the language, and from 503 are mentioned by historians with increasing frequency, while the Picts are all but forgotten and their dialect and racial characteristics are preserved only in the northern islands and the remote highlands. How the Scots, admittedly

1. 'Annals', I. p.13.

2. Ibid, p.71 ff.

3. Similar instances are quite frequent in the history of the races of men. See Deniker, p.323 ff.

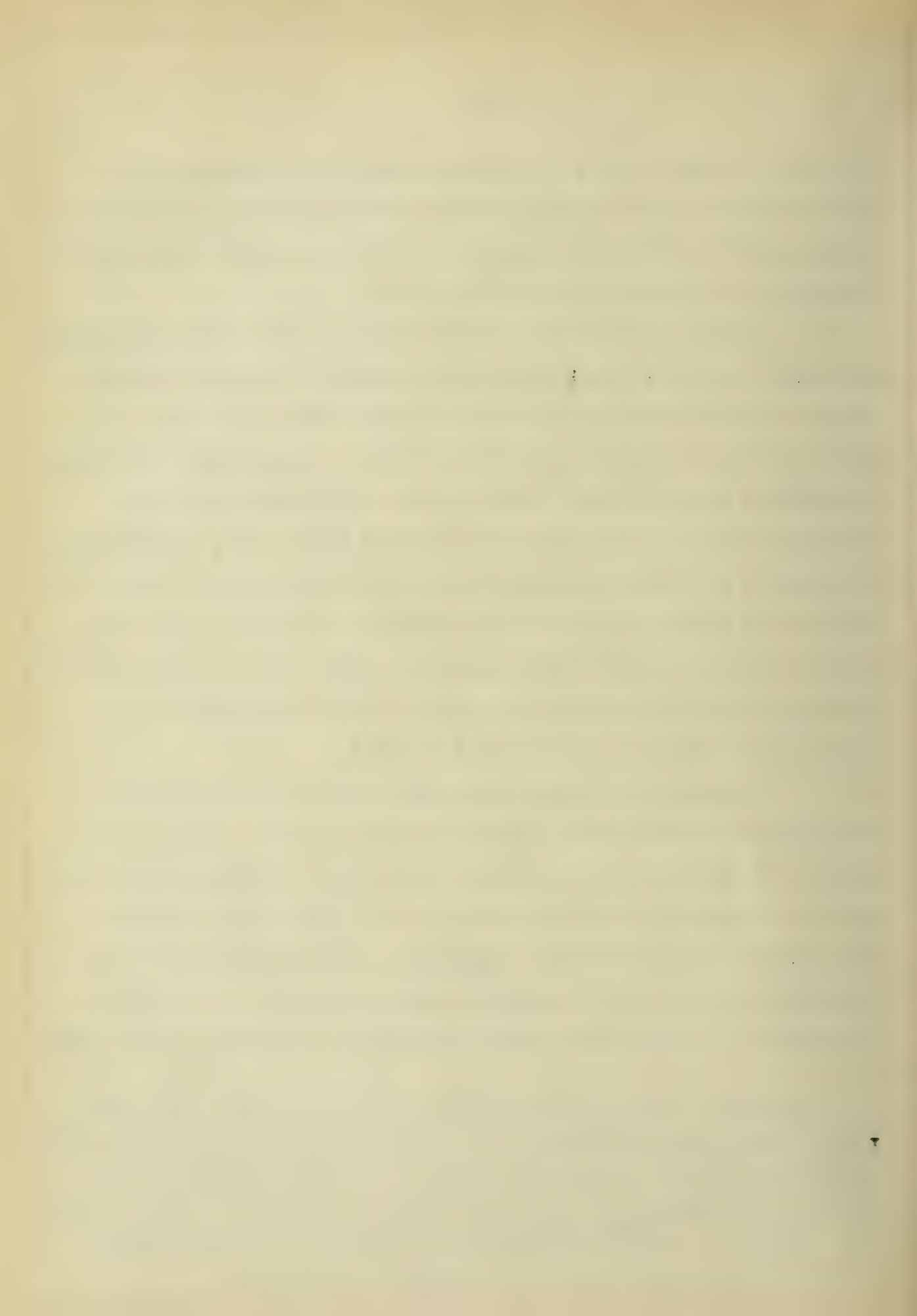


an inferior race, should be able permanently to impose upon a people superior in every way, their language, customs, and institution must ever remain a mystery to those who support Pinkerton's theory of the Gothic origin of the Picts.

Perhaps the most important phase of this whole discussion was that concerning the British influence on the modern Scottish dialect of the Lowlands. Pinkerton argued that the Picts were Goths and hence spoke a Teutonic dialect. He supported his theory by evidence from history. Tacitus said the Caledonians had a Germanic origin. The ancient Caledonians were Picts, therefore the Picts spoke a Germanic dialect. The Picts were known to have inhabited the Lowlands, and there a Teutonic dialect is now spoken while there is no other evidence of any other having been prevalent. Therefore the modern Scottish dialect of the Lowlands had its origin in the language spoken by the Picts.

Pinkerton's theory was questioned from the beginning but it gained rather wide popular credence and did not want the support of students of poetry and language. The wide-spread interest in the Ossianic and other Erse poetry, and in all northern antiquities, was undoubtedly fostered by the misconception that the Gaelic people were Teutons and their language a dialect of Germanic.¹) James Sibbald, who published a 'Chronicle of Scottish

1. The great vogue of the Ossianic poems in Germany must have been due in part at least to this feeling of racial kinship. See Fexte, 'Jean-Jacques Rousseau et les origines du cosmopolitisme littéraire', 1895, p. 322 ff. Some hint of the importance of the national spirit in the Romantic movement is given by Farley, 'Scandinavian Influences in the English Romantic movement', 1903. The part played by ethnological and linguistic theories in the literary movements of the late eighteenth century is an interesting problem but it has never been adequately considered.



Poetry from the thirteenth century to the Union of the Crowns', 1802, lent his support to the general theory outlined by Pinkerton. John Jamieson, after an extended review of the evidence, in the introductory dissertation to his 'Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language', 1808, declared himself convinced that the dialect of the Lowland Scots was not a daughter to English Saxon, but was a sister language derived from the Teutonic speech of the Picts. Such a theory as this was possible only before the science of comparative philology had differentiated the various branches of the Indo-European family, and shown something of their inter-relations. However, Ritson anticipated the conclusions of modern science in his treatment of the Picts. The Picts, he said, were not Teutons but Celts. Their language was therefore a Gaelic dialect and could have had little if any influence on modern Scottish. The Gaelic, or Erse, was not wholly unintelligible to English speaking persons of his day because it was ultimately derived from the same root as the Saxon and would have many characteristics in common with it. Yet it was a mistake, he maintained, to attempt to apply this parallel to Scottish and Saxon. The dialect of the Lowlands was identical with the Saxon spoken north of the Humber and it was folly to separate them.¹) To Ritson's astonishing array of historical evidence little of incontrovertible authenticity has since been added. The comparative method in philology has resulted in

1. See 'Annals', especially I.25 ff.; 135 ff.; and II.25 ff.

the common acceptance of certain general principles governing inter-relations of languages. By these Ritson's theory concerning the Scottish and Pictish dialects is supported.1)

1. Skene applies to Pinkerton's hypothesis the reasoning of Ritson, judged in the light of later scientific developments, but makes no mention of the dritic. 'Celtic Scotland', 1886, I. 196 ff. James Ferguson produced topographical and linguistic evidence to prove that the Celtic element in the native population of the modern Scotch Lowlands is much larger than is generally believed. See 'The Celtic Element in Lowland Scotland', Celtic Review, I. 246-60; 321-32.

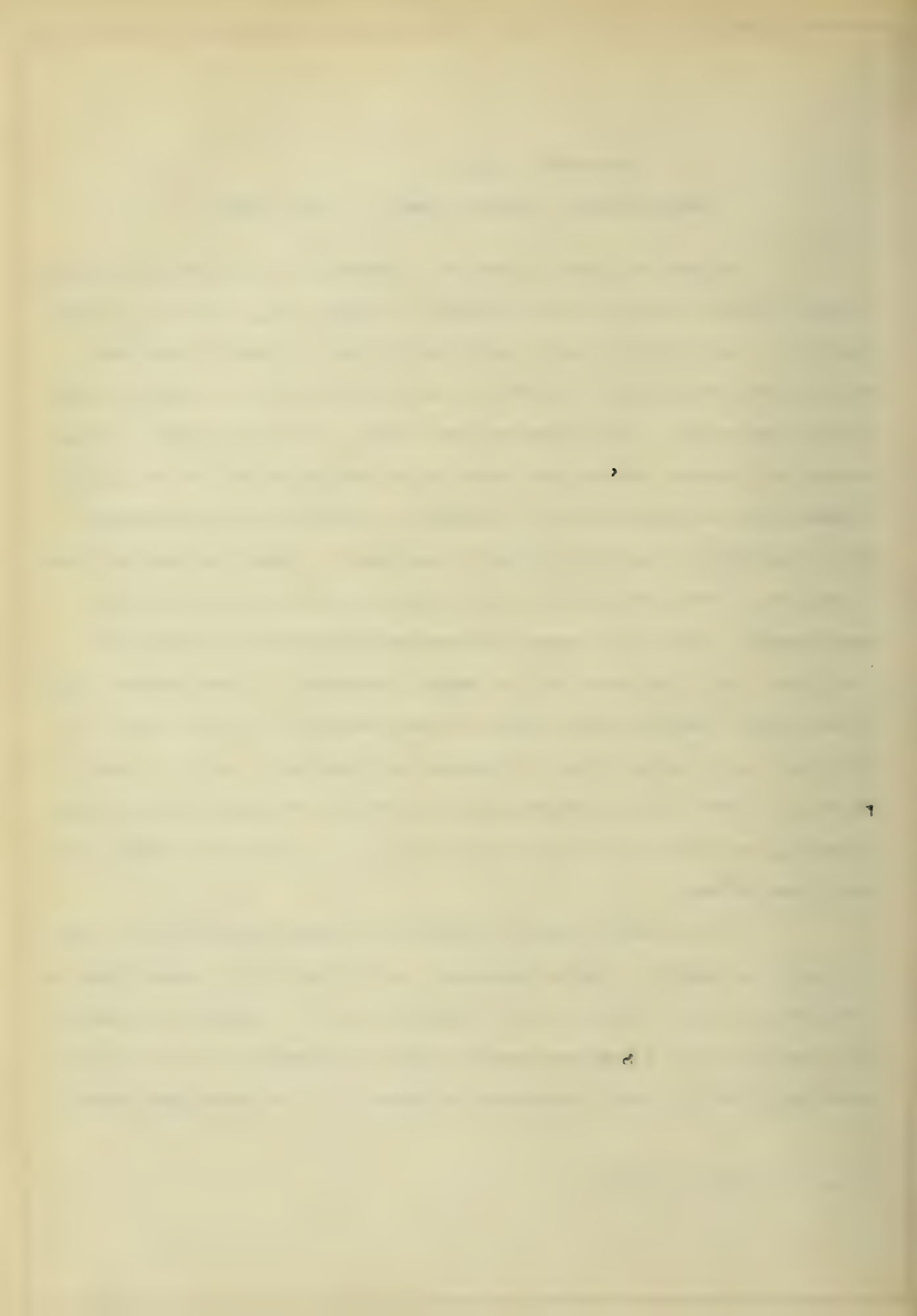
CHAPTER VIII.

Revolutionary Traits: Death. 1791-1803.

In dealing with Ritson's literary life and his editorial labors it has been thought[/]advisable to pass over, with only slight mention, his revolutionary characteristics. Allusion has been made to the vegetarian fad which fast^ened upon him in youth. Some slight exposition has likewise been given of his eccentric orthographical theory, which was begun in a tentative way in his early verses and was subsequently revived to become more persistently and apparently less intelligently employed in each succeeding publication. Reference has also been made to his anti-religious sentiments. While all these idiosyncrasies were manifest from youth up, yet they seem to the casual observer to have taken their rise in the revolutionary ardor which resulted from his visit to France. As he grew older he became more radical, and the trip to Paris, in addition to brightening the flame of radicalism already burning, supplied new fuel in the form of a complete reversal of political views.

In the early days of 1788 Ritson was considering a trip to Paris or Madrid, 'being ashamed', as he said, 'to have lived so long in the world and seen so little of it.'¹) Events in France, culminating in the States-General and the Storming of the Bastille, combined with his own busy-ness to deter him for more than three

1. 'Letters', I.132.



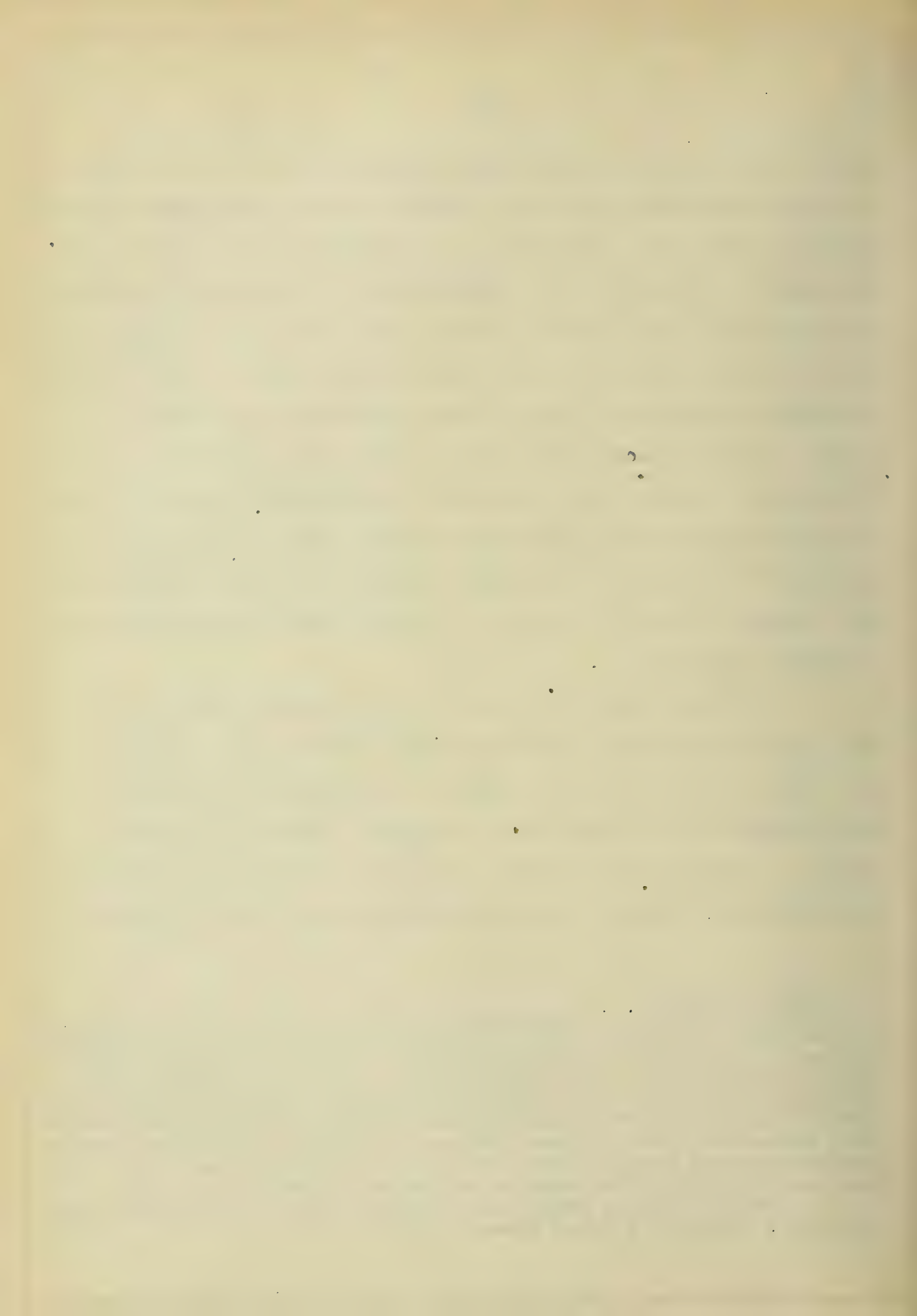
years from translating his thoughts into action. The temporary lull which succeeded the first violent outbursts of popular feeling seemed, to the most optimistic, to indicate that the 'Revolution' was ended. On June 9, 1791, Ritson wrote to a friend: 'My desire to reside for a few weeks at or near Paris has been increasing ever since the Revolution, and is in reality very strong: which you will readily conceive when I give it as a decided opinion that no people ancient or modern was ever so deserving of admiration.'¹⁾ Shortly after August 20th he set off for Paris in company with his friend William Shield, intending to remain till the beginning of October.²⁾ He seems to have had no other object than amusement, and probably found it convenient to remain even longer than he had at first intended.³⁾

Ritson arrived in Paris at a peculiarly happy moment. The ill-advised flight of the King had been abruptly terminated by his return to Paris in July. After the mutterings of discontent with the monarch's conduct had died away, attention centered mainly in the new Constitution. In early September this document was completed, revised, and accented by Louis. Upon this signal

1. Ibid, I.193.

2. Ibid, I.197, 201. R.H. Legge, writing Shield's life in D.N.B. states that 'in August 1792 he resigned his office at Covent Garden owing to a financial disagreement, and went to France and Italy with Joseph Ritson.' That this is not a typographical error for 1791 is evident from the context which supplies Shield's movements during that year. The authentic biography of Shield by John Robinson, Newcastle, 1891, I have not seen. Ritson's published correspondence proves clearly that the trip was taken between August 20, and Nov. 26, 1791. He makes no allusion to Italy.

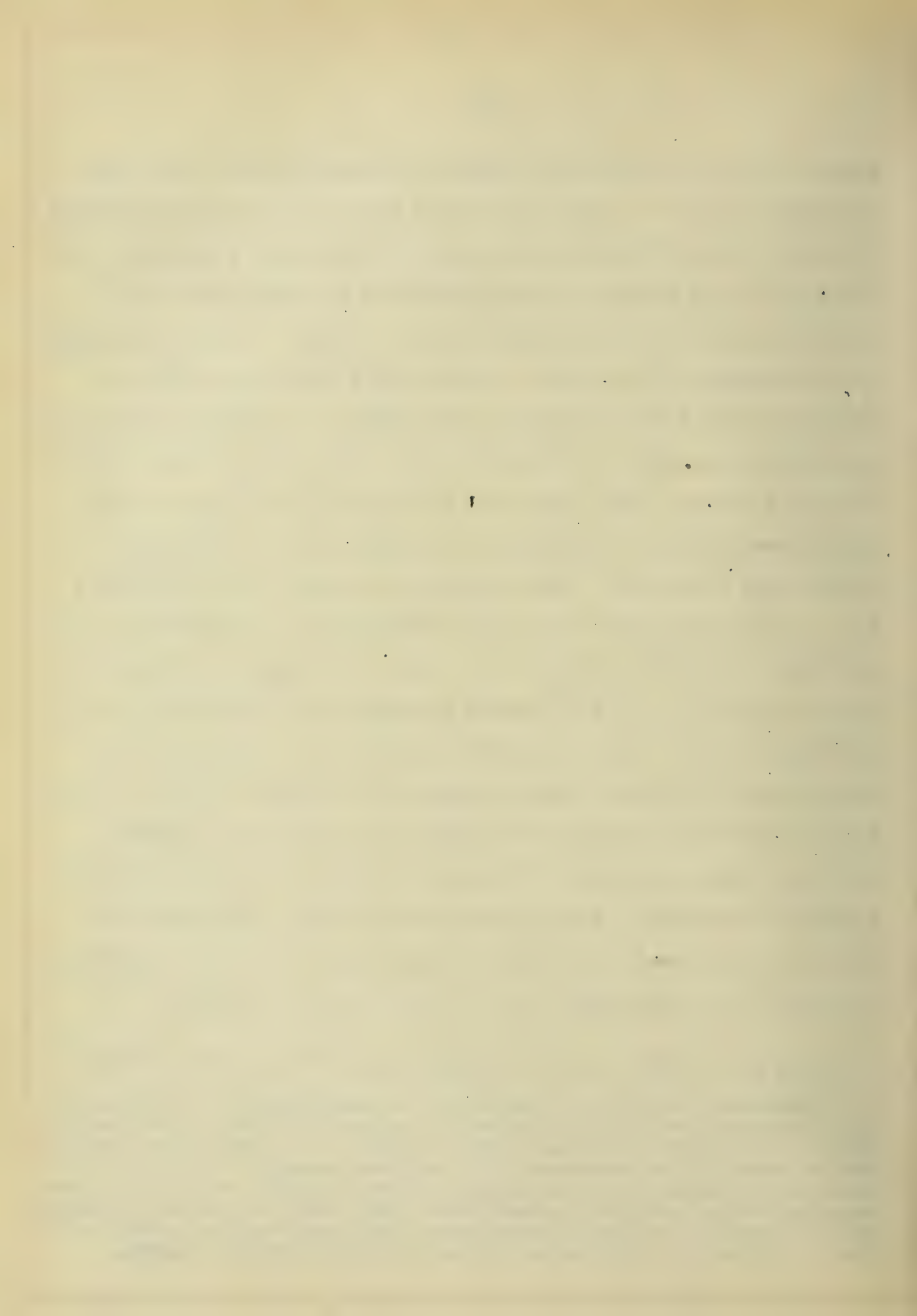
3. His first letter, which seems to have been written quite soon after his return, is dated November 26.



success of their designs the populace became jubilant, and there were 'gala-nights' in Paris. The sole topic of conversation seemed to be the Constitution, and the people were happy, forgiving, and hopeful.¹⁾ The effect of this exuberance and enthusiasm upon Ritson is shown in his correspondence. He says nothing of struggle, of lawlessness, of bloodshed; but he extols the principles for which the people were fighting, and praises, in unmeasured language, the new constitution. To Harrison he writes, in the first letter after his return: 'Well, and so I got to Paris at last: and was highly gratified with the whole of my excursion. I admire the French more than ever. They deserve to be free, and they really are so. You have read their new constitution: can anything be more admirable? We, who pretend to be free, you know, have no constitution at all. . . . As to modern politics, and the principles of the Constitution, one would think that half the people in Paris had no other employment than to study and talk about them. I have seen a fishwoman reading the Journal of the National assembly to her neighbor who appeared to listen with all the avidity of Shakespeare's blacksmith. You may now consider this government as completely settled, and a counter-revolution as utterly impossible: They are more than a match for all the slaves in Europe.'²⁾

1. Carlyle, 'History of the French Revolution', London, 1898, I.195 ff.

2. 'Letters', I.203-4. From his previous interest in literary and historical antiquities it was to be expected that Ritson would avail himself of this opportunity to visit the libraries of Paris and to consult the manuscripts of medieval poetry. It is certain that he did so, although he makes but one specific allusion to the material which came in his way: 'Her (Mary Queen of Scots) testament and letters the writer of these pages has seen, blotted with her tears, in the Scots College, Paris.' 'Scottish Songs', I.xlix.



To another correspondent he writes in the same strain:

'Mw sentiments are and ever have been so entirely correspondent to the ruling measures that I had only to rejoice at seeing a theory I had so long admired reduced to practise. I know that you and I do not exactly agree in our political principles. Your creed if I mistake not, is that a few men, whether born with boots and spurs or at least who have got them on, have a right to bridle, saddle and harness the rest, and ride or drive them with as much gentleness or violence as they see occasion: and that it is much more advisable for the latter to jog on peaceably and quietly than by kicking or flinging to provoke a larger portion of hard blows and hunger. This I believe is a npretty fair representation. . . . They order these matters very differently in the country I was speaking of, which, owing to the dissemination and establishment of those sacred and fundamental principles of liberty and equality, enjoys a degree of happiness and prosperity to which it had

In the letter just cited, he writes: 'Paris abounds with antiquities, and public monuments, which you would be delighted to see. There are three magnificent libraries: ^{two} of which at least, are infinitely beyond either Bodley's or the Museum, both for printed books and manuscripts. When united as they probably will be in a little time, they will form the first collection in the world. All three are open to everyone who chooses to go, without previous applications or any exceptions. The French read a great deal, and even the common people (such, I mean, as cannot be expected from their poverty, to have had a favorable education, for there is now no other distinction of rank,) are better acquainted with their ancient history than the English nobility are with ours. They talk familiarly of Charlechauve, and at St. Dennis I observed that all the company, mostly peasants or mechanics, recognized with pleasure the portrait of la Pucelle.'

hitherto been a stranger: but which is merely typical of that to which it will shortly arrive.'1)

Even when viewed abstractly this is high praise to come from an Englishman. But when it is recalled that this man who now states that his 'sentiments are and ever have been entirely correspondent to the ruling measures' of the French revolution, is the same, who, eleven years before had compiled, and only eight years earlier had revised for a second edition, the 'Fables of the Descent of the Crown',2) and who, in publications ranging through a decade had lost no opportunity to condemn in violent language those who under whatsoever pretext had sought to set aside the 'legitimate and inviolable lineal descent'3) to the throne, there appears to be a glaring inconsistency. When it is remembered, too, that the man who now declares with so much confidence that 'we have no constitution at all', is the same who, on several occasions heartily condemned the Revolution Parliament with having done more to destroy the English constitution than all other Parliaments had done to preserve it,4) it is still more apparent that a radical change of belief has taken place. It is not difficult to substantiate Ritson's statement that he had always admired the French people, but his earlier remarks concerning them have nothing to do with the revolutionary temper which they later exhibited. For instance, he strenuously denied the validity of the claim of

1. 'Letters', I. 208-9.

2. See ante pp. 60-61.

3. 'Remarks', pp. 84, 137, 128, etc.

4. Ibid, p. 124: 'English Songs', P. lxxxix.

Henry V. to the throne of France, and took occasion to commend Joan of Arc, and to praise the ill-starred Dauphin.¹⁾ He likewise lauded the poetic ability and the keen intellectual qualities of the French.²⁾ But none of these comments can, without violence, be adduced in support of his praise of the principles for which the French people struggled in the Revolution.

It is clear that Ritson's political faith had suffered a definite reversal. The erstwhile Jacobite is now an avowed Jacobin. He declared that he 'detested every species of aristocracy.' Yet he seems to waver slightly in the advice he gives his nephew concerning the authenticity of historians. 'Always prefer Tory or Jacobite writers', he says; 'the Whigs are the greatest liars in the world. You consult history for facts, not principles. The Whigs, I allow, have the advantage in the latter, and this advantage they are constantly laboring to support by a misrepresentation of the former.'³⁾ But perhaps this is his judgment asserting itself in the midst of his enthusiasm. The critical temper which served admirably in all his literary labors did not entirely desert him in his political zeal. By its aid he discovered the unworthy motives of many of the republican leaders in his own country. But this was ~~some time~~ after he had joined their ranks and had been for some time associated with them.

1. 'Remarks', p. 104: 'Ancient Songs', Preface.

2. 'English Songs', Preface; 'Ancient Songs', Preface.

3. 'Letters', II.121.

By 1793 Ritson was addressing his intimate friends as 'Citizen',¹⁾ and employing the Republican salutations in his letters.²⁾ He also adopted the Republican calendar and struggled for some months to understand it and to become 'perfect in its use.'³⁾ At the same time he declared himself a disciple of Paine, Voltaire and Rousseau, and adorned the walls of his chambers with their portraits. Upon sending Inegalite des hommes to his nephew he remarked: 'The excellent author looks down upon me: on the other side of the fireplace hangs the sarcastic Voltaire: while the enlightened and enlightening Thomas fronts the door: which is probably the reason, by the way, that scarce anybody has entered it since he made his appearance.'⁴⁾ During this period he renewed his friendship with Holcroft⁵⁾ and sought the acquaintance of Godwin, Thelwall, and the other Revolutionary leaders in England. He visited freely with these men, and followed their political fortunes very closely.⁶⁾ He advised his nephew to become familiar with their writings, which contained 'much deep and just reflection as well as excellent writing.'⁷⁾ And he himself commented freely

1. Ibid, II. passim.

2. Ibid, II: 'Health and Fraternity', 12, 86, 99, etc.: 'Health and Prosperity', 138, 142, etc.: 'Health and Judgment', 152, etc.: 'Health and Intellect', 154: 'Health and Friendship', 166: etc.

3. Ibid, II. 29, 53.

4. Ibid, II. 39.

5. Sidney Lee, D.N.B. article 'Ritson', implies that Ritson first made the acquaintance of Holcroft at this time, but he knew him at Stockton. See ante p. 19.

6. 'Letters', II. 34: K. Paul, 'William Godwin', 1876, I. 78: Holcroft's 'Memoirs', 1852.

7. 'Letters', II. 86.

on their books (except their novels, which he declared he never read),¹⁾ and sent Godwin a second list of errata in his works, after the first had been silently ignored.²⁾

The first few years after Ritson's return from Paris were, to use his own words, 'ticklish times' for the advocates of Liberty and Equality in England. Thomas Hardy founded 'The London Corresponding Society' in January 1792. In September the Society sent a congratulatory address to the National Convention of France, and before the end of the year was in correspondence 'with every Society in Great Britain which had been instituted for the purpose of obtaining by legal and constitutional means a reform in the Commons' house of Parliament.'³⁾ The rapid increase of the corresponding societies and their unconcealed intercourse with the Republicans in France caused the Government to adopt stringent measures to suppress or exterminate them. The cooperation of Horne Tooke's 'Society for Constitutional Information',⁴⁾ and John Thelwall's 'Society of the Friends of the People',⁵⁾ with Hardy's organization resulted in the arrest of all the leaders in the summer of 1794. On October 5th three bills were returned against them and eight others. On October 28th Hardy's trial was begun amid great excitement. His acquittal, on November 5th, was

1. Ibid, II.49. 'Novel writing is certainly in high estimation. Mrs. Radcliffe, author of 'The Romance of the Forset' has one at present in the hands of Robinsons for which she asks five hundred pounds, though it is but to consist of four volumes. Godwin also, and I believe, Holcroft, have each one in the press. In short, one would suppose all the world to be novel readers, though, for my part, I must with shame confess I never look into one.'

2. Ibid, II.112.

3. 'Mémorial of Thomas Hardy', 1832, p.24.

4. Alexander Steevens, 'Life of Horne Tooke',

5. 'Life of John Thelwall', 1837, I.

followed by those of Horne Tooke, November 22nd, and Thelwall, December 5th. The Government's case was so weak that the rest of the culprits were discharged without trial, to the great delight of the people and the extreme relief of many members of the Societies who felt themselves to be under the surveillance of spies.'1)

Ritson followed these trials with a great deal of interest. Although he declared that he had talked politics as little as possible, 'in order to avoid Newgate',2) yet he seems not to have felt perfectly secure until after the Government had failed in two attempts at conviction. At the acquittal of Horne Tooke he breathed a sigh of relief and remarked that the storm had now blown over and he considered himself safe.3) The success of the Revolutionists in their first encounter with the Government gave them a great deal of confidence in the justice of their cause and, as is not unusual in such cases, they almost immediately destroyed the confidence of unprejudiced persons by extravagances and inconsistency. 'Their constant cant', says Ritson, 'is the force and energy of mind to which all opposition is to be ineffectual.'4) They declared that no member of their Society under conviction should have hired defense at his trial, but should depend upon his own eloquence and the undoubted justice of his case. While the

1. See Smith, 'Story of the English Jacobins,' 1881, and Holwell, 'State Trials', xxiii.1013; xxiv.199-1408.

2. 'Letters', II.7.

3. Ibid, II.57.

4. Ibid, II.69.

leaders were perfectly willing for this rule to be enforced in the trials of the 'common men', and while they thus allowed men to be 'suspected of Jacobinism and hanged for felony',¹⁾ yet when their own lives were in jeopardy they exerted every effort to secure the best legal talent in their behalf. Although it was Ritson's own theory that the innocent should need no hired defense at the criminal bar,²⁾ yet he was extremely disgusted at the inconsistency of some of the Revolutionists and condemned their selfishness. 'Mister Yorke, (for a culprit in a black silk coat does not appear to deserve the title of citizen)',³⁾ was one of the worst offenders. Upon his arrest in 1795 he sent out to his friends a popular appeal for funds to aid in his defense, preferring to keep his own fortune intact. This form of mendicancy, Ritson said, he especially abominated, and he was delighted that Yorke was sentenced to a fine and imprisonment in spite of all his trouble.⁴⁾

Ritson soon became thoroughly disgusted with the Republican leaders. He considered them not only inconsistent but insincere. 'To confess the truth', he said, 'the more I see of these modern patriots and philosophers the less I like them.'⁵⁾ Holcroft and Godwin, in particular fell under his censure: the former for his over-weening egotism: the latter for his inconsistent application of the new philosophy. Holcroft regretted

1. Ibid, II.103.

2. See ante p. 50

3. 'Letters', II.96.

4. Ibid; Howell, 'State Trials', 25.1154.

5. Ibid, II.96.



keenly that he had not been allowed to display his oratorical talents at his trial, and declared that he would gladly have given one of his hands for the opportunity of making his own defense: 'which', Ritson remarked, 'would certainly have hanged him, however favorable his judges might have been beforehand.'¹⁾ Godwin was ridiculed for recognizing the authority of an institution which he professed to hold in contempt by having his marriage with Mary Wollstonecraft sanctioned by the ceremonies of the Church of England.²⁾ Ritson's quarrel with Godwin over the loan of books and money no doubt intensified his bitterness. On January 16, 1801, he wrote to the Philosopher: 'I wish you would make it convenient to return me the thirty pounds I lent you.'³⁾ Godwin was unable to repay the money, but he had sent a copy of his tragedy which he hoped would please Ritson. The critic replied in surly tones: 'Though you have not ability to repay the money I lent, you might have integrity enough to return the books you borrowed. . . . I never received a copy of your unfortunate tragedy: nor, from the fate it experienced, and the character I have read and heard of it, can I profess myself very anxious for its perusal.'⁴⁾ But the unctuous Godwin was not in the least disturbed by the consequences of Ritson's 'transient misapprehension', and by repaying a few pounds of the loan, and by the discreet employment of flattery succeeded in drawing from him a half-hearted apology.⁵⁾

1. Ibid, II.63.

2. Ibid, II.154.

3. Paul, 'William Godwin', 1876, II.61.

4. Ibid, March 7, 1801.

5. Ibid, II.61-64. Ritson to Godwin, March 10, 1801 and August 25, 1801; and Godwin to Ritson, March 10, 1801.

But even though Ritson became disgusted with the methods employed by the Revolutionary leaders in England, he seems never to have given over his allegiance to republican principles. Upon his return from France he was anxious that the English people should enjoy a degree of freedom equal to that of the French. This end could be gained only by a revolution and he thought the upheaval would be sudden and violent. The works of the Corresponding Societies and of the Republican orators had its effect, but he looked for the real source of a popular uprising to dissatisfaction with economic conditions. In 1793 he wrote: 'With respect to a revolution, though I think it at no great distance, it seems to defy all calculations for the present. If the increase of taxes the decline of manufactures, the high price of provisions, and the like, have no effect upon the apathy of the sans culottes here, one can expect little from the reasoning of philosophers or politicians. When the pot boils violently, however, it is not always in the cook's power to prevent ^{some of the fat} from falling into the fire.'¹⁾ He continued for some time to hope that the English people would work out their own salvation,²⁾ but with the progress of hostilities between the French republic and Holland, England and Spain, he looked forward to a French invasion which would establish the ideal government on the island. Everything, he said, was to be hoped from the success of the French in Holland; nothing without

1. 'Letters', II.23.

2. Ibid, II.42.

It.'1) After nearly a decade of waiting, in 'momentary expectation of the arrival of the French fleet',2) he abandoned hope of any great assistance from the continent. The Republicans were already proving themselves unworthy of the high confidence he had reposed in them, and with the change of the Eng^{ish} and ministry in 1801 he prayed for a 'settled and permanent peace.'3)

It has been generally stated that Ritson's Revolutionary ardor led him to accept the religious principles of the leaders of that movement.4) But it is apparent from a survey of his letters and publications that, while his visits to France and his subsequent interest in the heroes of the Revolution undoubtedly intensified his animosity to orthodox religion, they did not originate it. From his earliest book, which appeared nine years before his foreign visit, he was outspoken in condemnation of the bible, the church, and all religious sects. There is no evidence of religious training in his early life and he seems to have brought to his work a deep-seated aversion to Christianity. In his historical essays he made frequent and always disparaging allusions to religion. It was his declared opinion that the Christianizing of the Saxons was their undoing, and he dated the 'perversion of true history' from the time it began to be written by monks, and the 'disgrace of English literature' from the age in which the legends of the Christian saints were believed and pro-

1. Ibid, II.63.

2. Ibid, II.128,182.

3. Ibid, II.205.

4. 'Ritson worshipped the heroes of the French revolution, and also adopted their unfortunate religious ideas', Chambers, 'Book of Days', II.406. 'He accepted also the religious views of his French heroes, and declared himself an atheist'. D.N.B. article 'Ritson'.

mulgated. 'While the Saxons continued pagans', he writes, 'they were unquestionably a brave and warlike nation; but upon their conversion to Christianity their kings became monks, the people cowards and slaves, unable to defend themselves, and a prey to every invader.'¹⁾ Elsewhere he asked what advantages the Saxons had gained, how much their understanding had been enlightened, or how much their morals had been improved, to counterbalance the destruction of their national genius and spirit.²⁾ According to his theory the origin of Romance was to be sought 'in the different systems of superstition which have from time to time prevailed, whether pagan or Christian. The gods of the ancient heathens', he continues, 'and the saints of the more modern Christians, are the same sort of imaginary beings who alternately give existence to romances, and receive it from them. The legends of the one and the fables of the other, have been constantly fabricated for the same purpose, and with the same view - the promotion of fanaticism, which, being mere illusion, can only be excited or supported by romance. . . . There is this distinction indeed, between the heathen deities and the Christian saints, that the fables of the former were indebted for their existence to the flowery imagination of the sublime poet, and the legends of the latter to ^{the} gloomy fanaticism of a lazy monk or stinking priest.'³⁾

1. 'Metrical Romances', I.33.

2. 'English Songs', I.xlvii, lviii, etc. In one of the cancelled passages in 'Metrical Romances', he said the Saxons would have been better off if they never had a bible to read. See Appendix C.

3. 'Metrical Romances', I.19.

His disrespect for the ministers of the church, both medieval and modern, was unequivocally voiced: 'A piper', he exclaimed, 'is preferable to a parson.'¹⁾ He thought it due to the 'malicious endeavors of pitiful monks, by whom history was consecrated to the crimes and follies of ^{titled} ~~little~~ ruffians and sainted idiots', that the 'patriotic exertions and virtuous acts' of Robin Hood had not been recorded for the edification of posterity.²⁾ But the crimes of the early churchmen were not merely negative. In the distorted vision of this hypochondriac critic they had fathered upon English history and literature an incubus from which they had struggled in vain to free themselves. He writes: 'The forgery and ~~and~~ ^{fabr}ication of lying legends, of James the son of Zebedee, Simon Zealot, Simon Peter and Saint Paul and many more such nonentities, all forgery and falsehood, have been greedily swallowed up to the pollution of true history and the everlasting disgrace of English literature.'³⁾ With the churchmen of his own day he was no less unreasonable. If his violence towards Percy and Warton was not intensified by their connection with the church, at least his sneering allusions to their ecclesiastical position would make such a deduction by no means illogical.⁴⁾ He took no pains to save their moral feelings, but seemed rather to embrace every opportunity to expose what he considered an

1. Ibid, I.109.

2. 'Robin Hood', I.xv, xix.

3. 'King Arthur', p.126.

4. This was the point of view taken by nearly all the Reviews.

inconsistency between their religious profession and their literary practise.¹⁾

For the church as an institution Ritson professed no respect, and he had only jeers for the various religious sects. He spoke with fluency of 'Calvinistic bigotry',²⁾ of the 'fanatical puritans', and of 'those modern puritans the methodists'.³⁾ Concerning his nephew's early training he wrote to Wadeson: 'I know not whence you collect any intention in me of making him a papist, unless you suppose that napacy and fiddling necessarily go together. I shall rely on your care in preventing his mother's making a methodist of him: but must insist that you do not attempt to make him a presbyterian, which, if there be any difference in such sectarists, is the worst among them.'⁴⁾ A little later he reproved Frank for being 'one of the gang of methodist enthusiasts' who increased his sister's religious melancholy by singing and praying.⁵⁾ It was his earnest wish that there should be 'no singing of hymns' at his sister's funeral,⁶⁾ and no clergyman present at his^{own} burial.⁷⁾ For the bible and its great characters⁸⁾ he maintained an irreverence which ripened through the years into calumny, so that at the end of his life he was engaged upon an atheistic pamphlet.

1. His satirization of the religious comments of Johnson and Steevens will be recalled in this connection.

2. 'Ancient Songs', I.xxvii.

3. Ibid, I.lxxviii: 'Scotish Songs', I.cii; 'Letters', I.100.

4. 'Letters', I.24.

5. Ibid, I.101.

6. Ibid, II.7

7. See his Will, printed by Nicolas, p.lxv.

8. Merlin he frequently asserted to be a more veracious prophet than Isaiah. 'King Arthur', lxxv; Appendix C.

There can be little doubt that Ritson was an atheist, although he nowhere explicitly declares himself such. Robert Smith, who was perhaps as intimate with Ritson as any other member of the Inn, declared that he did not think him an atheist. But his reasoning is by no means convincing. If he were an atheist, he said, 'why should he send up ejaculations to God, or talk of the Devil tormenting people whom he believed had used him very ill?'¹⁾ But it is common knowledge that the most blatant infidel may speak with familiarity of God and the Devil while denying their existence. On the other hand, Mrs. Kirby, who had known Ritson from his youth up, said he undoubtedly was an atheist and had often declared himself such to her. 'He did not believe there was any such being as an Almighty God, or that there was any future state of rewards or punishment, and the greatest devil he knew was a nasty, crabbed, ill-natured old woman.'²⁾ It is highly probable that Ritson confined his remarks on this question to his most intimate friends, not deeming it politic to declare himself publicly. His nephew seems to have possessed his confidence in this as in most other matters. Shortly after his return from France Ritson wrote to him, apropos of the number of atheists in England: 'I suppose the late proceedings in France will make that animal less rare.'³⁾

1. Appendix B.

2. Ibid. Mrs. Kirby likewise maintained that Ritson 'played the hypocrite' in taking the oaths of allegiance, supremacy, and abjuration on his admittance to the Bar.

3. 'Letters', II.34.

On the question of the future state he is more specific. In the first year (f0) of the nineteenth century he wrote to his 'worthy, venerable and very dear friend' Harrison congratulating him on his long life, and in that letter remarked: 'You know my sentiments with regards to other worlds, which I believe, are not likely to change. My health is much impaired, my frame disordered, and my spirits depressed; so that I have no hopes for myself of an eternal existence; and am rather, in fact, disposed to wonder that I have lived so long; having had the mortification to see many whom I loved and esteemed drop from time to time around me at a much more immature age.'¹⁾ Although he could at times write in this calm and dispassionate manner, there were occasions when he viewed life, and perhaps death, less steadily. His last illness resulted, at the end of his life, in frequent mental aberrations. In these last days he devoted his energy to a new publication proving Christ an impostor. This pamphlet was never finished. It was laid aside a short time before he was permanently bereft of reason and the sheets already written were destroyed in the flames. The religiously inclined of his own day believed that remorse had seized him, and that by the hand of Providence he was arrested in the final sacreligious undertaking.²⁾

A consideration of Ritson's destructive comments affords an accurate but not an adequate view of his principles; accurate because it reveals his attitude to religious affairs, inadequate

1. Ibid, II.205.

2. See Appendix B.

because it does not include his ethical creed. He was a man of uncompromising moral integrity. His insistence on fidelity and honesty in editorial labors is well known. To deceive, to simulate to shirk one's duty was to incur his wrath. And this had to do not only with literary matters; he held the same standards for every activity of life. In his letters of counsel to his nephew he emphasized right and honest action. On one occasion he wrote to Frank, then a mere boy, 'Never hesitate between a beggar and a half-penny worth of nuts. I know not whether by adopting this maxim you may (as the Scripture says) 'lay up treasures in heaven', but this I am sure of, that the relish of a good action will continue longer and be a thousand times more grateful than that of an apple.'¹) From the very first his philosophy was grounded on humanitarian principles. After enumerating various inhuman practices he admonishes his youthful nephew thus: 'All these you ought to detest and abhor; and, by following the contrary and opposite paths of Reason and Virtue, you will obtain, or, what is the same thing, deserve the love and esteem of every one who knows you: and if they do not make you a great man, they will at least make you a good one which is a much superior, and far more excellent character.'²) Reason and virtue are not clearly defined, but Ritson's test of the reasonableness of an act, and so of its rightness or wrongness, was its utility. 'What is right or wrong but that which

1. 'Letters', I.64.

2. Ibid, I.21-2.



is useful or pernicious', he asks late in life. 'Is there any other criterion?'¹⁾ His acceptance of Reason²⁾ as the guide of conduct allied him naturally with the revolutionary leaders and cut him off effectually from the disciples of revealed religion. With undoubted sincerity he lived the present life according to what he considered the most exalted standards and if, with this, he had not the consolation of a future existence he deserves rather the commiseration than the condemnation and ridicule of those who consider themselves more fortunate.

Immediately upon his return from France Ritson took up with some enthusiasm his private system of spelling which had been practically abandoned a year earlier. As we have already seen, his very first publication, the amatory 'Versees', exhibited a unique mode of spelling characterized by discarding the capital I in the middle of a sentence and by giving all words ending in e their full form when suffixes were added. Although he stated at this time that this was the 'only specimen of my system of spelling that ever was, or perhaps, ever will be printed'³⁾ yet the following year, in the 'Remarks' he undertook to explain on the basis of his own system of spelling, the necessity for lengthening some of Shakespeare's words to fill out the meter, and laid down what he believed to be its fundamental principle.. 'Every verb in the English language gains an additional syllable by its termination in est,

1. Ibid, II.90.

2. There is no external evidence of Ritson's indebtedness to either Bentham or Hume. He might have got his philosophy from them or from any of the Revolutionary leaders. The doctrine was sufficiently current.

3. Haslewood Appendix.



eth, ed, ing, or (when formed into a substantive) in er.'1) He felt it useless to urge such a unique system further at this time but declared that the English language was in great need of systematization along orthographical lines. In 'English Songs' published in the same year, he indulged his whim to a limited extent,2) and in the 'Quip Modest' 1788 again took up the cudgels in defense of his principles and against Tyrwhitt who had attacked them as 'quite fanciful and unfounded .' His main object here was, he said, to contend for 'a system of spelling, as I am perfectly confident we have none at present, or at least I have never been able to find it.'3) He was not yet confident of his own system, however, and had not worked it out fully in his own mind. In 1790 he said the theory set forth in the Shakespeare pamphlets 'requires to be sealed a little more , which, however, I have very little inclination to do at present.'4) He saw the impracticability of urging upon an unwilling and an ignorant public, the virtues of his new theory. Nevertheless, he was emphatic in declaring that nothing could be urged against it but the ordinary argument of prejudice against improvement, viz., that it is an innovation.'5) The following year he went to France, and his contact with the revolutionary ideas seemed to give him confidence in every kind of innovation, and to enable him for a time at least to work earnestly

1. 'Remarks', 8.

2. Park standardized the spelling in second edition 'knowing that Ritson intended to dispense with the irregularities himself, had he lived to republish the work.'

3. 'Quip Modest', p.3.

4. 'Letters', I.177.

5. Ibid, I.177.

to counteract the 'prejudice against improvement', although he made little headway. In the first letter written after his return he employed his orthographical principles more fully than ever before, writing: 'easily', 'humiliateing', 'heared', 'discoverys!', etc. 'You observe, by the way', he remarked parenthetically, 'i am teaching you how to spell.' At the end of this letter he said, 'if you know any cause or just impediment why words should not be spelled in my way you are to declare it.'¹⁾ And yet with all his new enthusiasm, Ritson was not an advocate of innovation merely because it was ~~an~~ innovation. He ridiculed his nephew's desire to abolish the capital letter at the beginning of lines of poetry when not also the beginning of a sentence.²⁾ That custom had become a fixed and universal distinction, and there was no sufficient reason for abolishing it unless it could be proved that the benefit accruing from the change would considerably overbalance the confusion resulting from such an innovation,- and this he said could not be proved. Until convinced of the contrary, 'I am entitled to maintain that the practise is right, merely in short, because it is a practise. Never wake a sleeping lion.'³⁾

But Ritson did not follow his own excellent advice. Although the use of 'himself', 'themselves', etc. had become estab-

1. Ibid, I.203.

2. This innovation Capell had employed in his 'Prolusions' 1760, only to meet with universal ridicule and attempt.

3. 'Letters', II.85. Frank went to more ridiculous extremes than his uncle and his ardent discipleship was rewarded with the heated charge that he was 'entirely ignorant of the principles as well of orthography as of pronunciation', and he 'rather wished to be singular than studied to be right.' Ibid, II.89,96.

lished, he prepared a lengthy dissertation proving that 'self is always a substantive; as in myself, thyself, etc. and, consequently himself is anomalous and absurd.'¹⁾ The process of dropping the k from words ending in -ck had become quite noticeable by this time.²⁾ But for the sake of consistency Ritson wished to restore it. His reason is thus stated: 'It appears that as many words still continue to end in -ck as have been made to end in c; and, as the privation cannot possibly be applied to the former list, I conclude it will be the best method not to apply it to the latter. There may be some exceptions, as no rule is without them: but your question should have been not why the k is to be preserved in such or such words, but why it came to be rejected from them.'³⁾ To revise English orthography and grammar with a view to absolute consistency would be a gigantic task, impossible for any single man to accomplish and equally impossible for any body of men unless clothed with unlimited authority. Left to its natural course language develops irregularly and often illogically,⁴⁾ and this too, in spite of the efforts of reformers and systematizers.

Ritson worked with his system of spelling and grammar for many years, yet never came to the point of absolute certainty on all its phases. In 1795 he wrote: 'I have scarcely courage

1. Ibid, II.144.

2. Walker's 'Rhyming Dictionary', 1775, gives a list of several hundred words in -ck, and another of practically equal length from which the k has been dropped.

3. 'Letters', II.106.

4. See Bloomfield, 'The Study of Languages', 1914, pp.16,195 ff. 259 ff.

enough to apply my principles of orthography to the verb or participle in *en*: not knowing well what to do with the words given, *riven*, *driven*, etc.etc. However, I take *rineen*, *hasteen*, *spokeep*, etc. to be perfectly accurate.'¹⁾ But uncertainty on particular points did not deter him from employing the general system in his published works. Each volume was more forbidding in appearance than its predecessor, and after his return from France the promiscuous use of mutilated forms rendered much of his text obsolete, and even unintelligible. It was often necessary for him to modify his spelling as well as his religious sentiments in order to secure a publisher. 'King Arthur' was refused by Longman because of its eccentric orthography. And the editors of all his posthumous publications found it necessary to 'reduce his orthography to the recognized standard of our language.' There is no reason to believe, as some of these editors have stated,²⁾ that Ritson would have modernized the spelling himself if he had lived to see the books through the press. Under wholly different circumstances this might have been possible. But as illness with its consequent insanity settled down upon him he became more eccentric in every way and more violently aggressive in exhibiting his idiosyncrasies.

From his own day to ours Ritson's orthography has been made the butt of numerous critics. A factitious letter in the *Monthly Mirror*, August 1803, put together by 'Old Nick' ludicrous-

1. 'Letters', II.106.

2. See Prefaces to the various posthumous publications.

ously exposed some of his variations from the common rules of spelling. Subsequent writers declare that his orthography was based on no rule or principle, was according to no plan, exhibited no conception of the relations/of words, but was the caprice of fancy, and the sport of a crank.¹⁾ That it was, especially in his latter years, largely the result of fancy and caprice there can be no doubt. But it is equally true that it had its inception and its early nurture in what he himself erroneously considered to be the accurate rules of historical grammar. His fault was in not realizing the essentially plastic nature of language, and its consequent instability, so that the rules of Shakespeare's time, even though they could be with absolute certainty determined, would not apply to our own. Ritson published nothing to compare with Elphinston's 'Propriety ascertained in her picture, or English Speech and Spelling under mutual guides', 1787, and his 'English Orthography epitomized, and Propriety's Pocket Dictionary', 1790; but he did prepare three treatises which no doubt embodied his grammatical and orthographical systems. His 'Dissertation on the use of 'Self'', his 'Gleanings of English Grammar', and his 'English Dictionary' have all been destroyed or lost. Without them he is only to be classed with Capell, Elphinston, Pinkerton, Lander, and others of the large body of 'orthographic mutineers' whose peculiar eccentricities have served mainly to amuse the public.

1. See especially Haslewood, p. 29; Beers, 'English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century', p. 297; DeQuincey's 'Works', xi.441. For contemporary remarks see the reviews of any of his publications.

We have already seen the origin of Ritson's vegetarianism in the reading, at nineteen years of age, of Mandeville's 'Fable of the Bees.' By his own statement, he was induced after 'serious reflection' to take up this mode of life, and throughout his remaining years he adhered to it in the face of scorn, ridicule and violent abuse. There is a very reasonable doubt as to whether this habit of diet was due solely to personal whim, and was a mere fad, as it has continually called. If his reasons for abjuring animal food were personal they were at any rate founded on what he believed to be the unshakable rock of Reason and Virtue. He was fundamentally and sincerely humanitarian in nature; feeling deeply for all the lower forms of life and repeatedly declaring that animals had as much right to the enjoyments of life as man himself. In limiting his diet to vegetable food he felt that he was not only conserving life, but that he was contributing to his own happiness by freeing his conscience from the accusation of murder. He was anxious that others should enjoy the bodily vigor and mental tranquillity which he maintained always accompanied abstinence from animal food, and so he sought to make proselytes. His young nephew was, not unnaturally his first convert. In the letters to him along with an exaggerated idea of the importance of his net hobby, there is much sound advice and good common sense.

His earliest counsel to Frank was primarily humanitarian. In 1781 he wrote: 'Cruelty and barbarity or wantonness to brute animals, birds, insects, or any other living thing which you might have power over: not forgetting the inhuman custom of taking

birds' nests, eggs, etc. which is abominable: all this you ought to detest and abhor.'1) A few months later he said: 'humanity and good nature are the first and highest virtues that the mind of man is capable of entertaining.'2) Within a year from this time he had by reason and the offer of a small monthly stipend persuaded Frank of the virtue of eating no meat.3) He praised his nephew for persisting 'so heroically in a mode of living, which you will one day or other find to have been of essential service both to your body and mind, by preserving health and a good conscience, neither of which you could possibly have if you addicted yourself to the unnatural and diabolical practise of devouring your fellow creatures, as pigs and geese undoubtedly are.'4) This is the strain in which his comments always run. With the single-mindedness of the fanatic, he did not appreciate the absurdity of his theories when pushed to extremes. It was apparently easy for him to declare, for he said it more than once, and no doubt came firmly to believe it, that no one who ate animal food could have a sound ^{mind} ~~body~~, a strong body, or a clear conscience. The result in his own case gave eloquent testimony to the unsoundness of his reasoning.

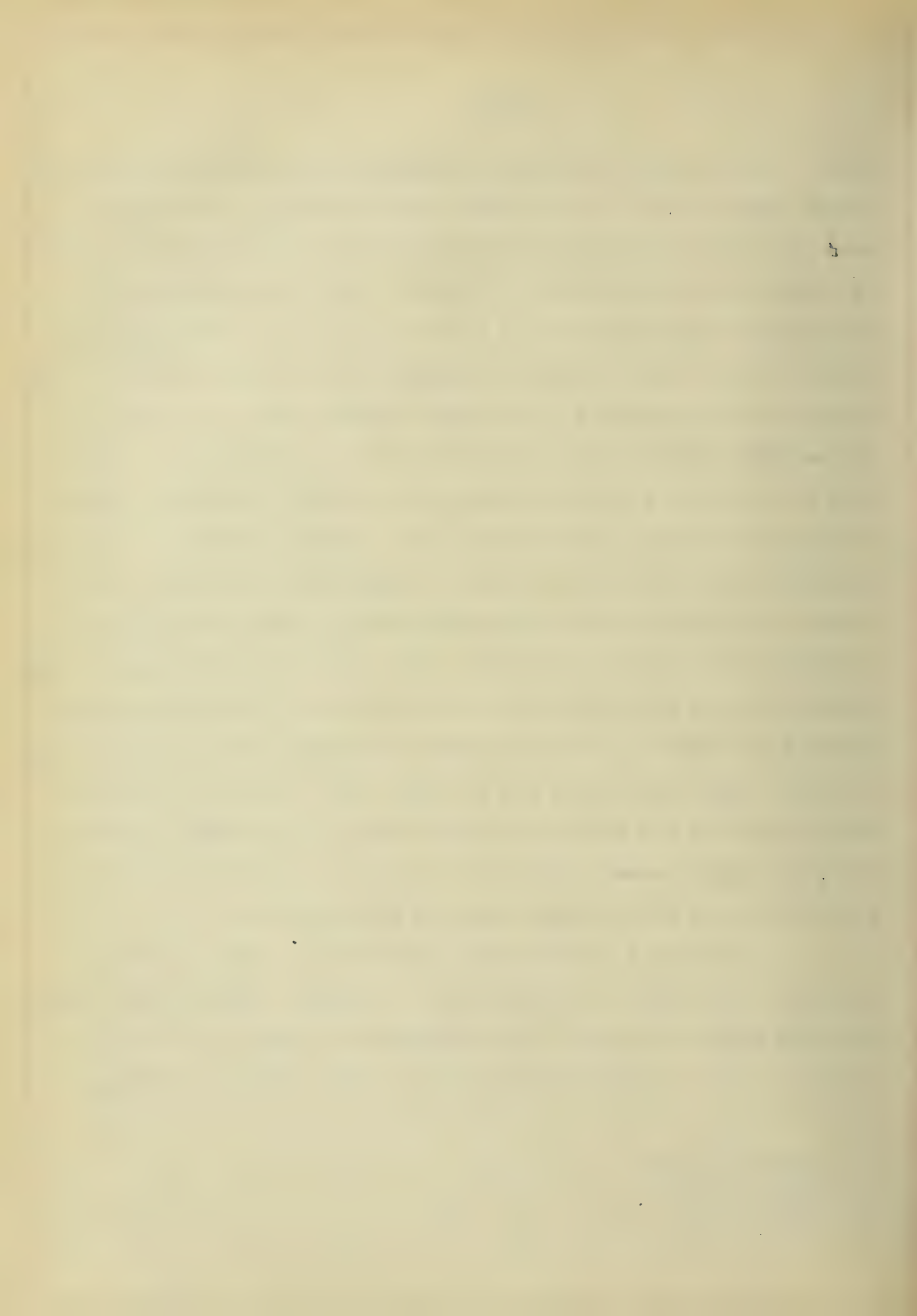
Frank was a willing and enthusiastic disciple and appealed to the decision of his uncle in doubtful cases. After eggs had been added to the list of contraband, he asked if it was improper to eat a pudding which contained eggs. Mitson replied;

1. 'Letters', I.21.

2. Ibid, I.29.

3. Ibid, I.62.

4. Ibid, I.39.



drawing a very nice distinction! 'I think that if a pudding stand before you, you are not obliged to refuse it on account of the eggs. I do not myself. But I should never direct a pudding to be made ~~for~~ ^{with} eggs in it.'¹⁾ Frank likewise carried into practise the humanitarian principles which he had learned, and on one occasion Ritson was obliged to write to his sister a mild protest on the unforeseen results of his teaching: 'I rather think Joe went a little too far in putting Mrs. Wiseman's cat to death for killing a mouse, which, perhaps nature, certainly education had taught her to look upon as a duty.'²⁾

Ritson's sister was his second and last known convert to vegetarianism. In her case, as in his own and Frank's, the results were unfortunate and well nigh disastrous. His tender solicitation on the occasion of her illness reveals the affection and compassion of ~~his~~ ^{the} nature which lay back of his eccentric and uninviting manner. Following his suggestion ³⁾ she had limited herself to a vegetable diet but the sudden change of a life-long habit so impaired her strength that she was reduced to serious illness, and the judicious use of wines and meats was prescribed as the only means of restoring her to health. In deference to her brother she refused to comply with these instructions. Learning of the serious consequences of

1. 'Letters', I.41.

2. Ibid, I.95.

3. Ibid, I.47. 'You will certainly find yourself healthier, and if you have either conscience or humanity, happier, in abstaining from animal food than you could possibly be in depriving, by the indulgence of an unnatural appetite and the adherence to a barbarous custom, hundreds, if not thousands, of innocent creatures of their lives, to the enjoyment of which they have as good a right as yourself.'

his teaching, Ritson hastened to inform her that he never meant his words to be taken so literally nor followed to such extremes. 'I hardly wished and never expected', he wrote, anologetically, 'that my scruples on this head would influence you so far as to make you give up the mode of living to which you have always been accustomed. Certainly not that you would resolve to deny yourself what everybody about you, nay, even almost the whole world, eats without concern or reflection, when your very existence might perhaps depend upon it. I shall not weary you with further argument. I only hope and desire that as you relinquished the use of this food out of complaisance to me as a philosopher, you will now revive it out of affection for me as a brother.'¹⁾

On another occasion he censured Wadeson for backsliding after he had been almost persuaded never to taste a mouthful of animal food again. This half-humorous outburst is concluded in mock-seriousness: 'But, alas! miracles will never cease! - and God knows whether I myself, who am thus preaching to you, and set such an example of temperance and humanity to all, may not be found one day or other devouring lambs and turkeys, geese and capons, and all other creatures which earth, air, or sea, can furnish, and the luxury of the most voluptuous epicures have for these thousand years past been day by day singling out for the beastly satisfaction of their unnatural appetites.'²⁾

This is excellent sarcasm. So long as an individual can treat of his own personal foibles and eccentricities in this

1. 'Letters', I.49.

2. Ibid, I.32.

fashion he is on the safe side of the dividing line between sanity and lunacy. It is comparatively easy for peculiarities of thought and manner to be so exaggerated as to lead almost insensibly into insanity. Unfortunately this was the trend of Ritson's crotchets. Their final summation in 'An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food as a Moral Duty', 1802, gives many evidences of insanity. Due to ~~his~~^{its} numerous ear-marks of idiosyncrasy this book did not readily find a publisher. It was finally accepted at the Jacobinical shop of Richard Phillips,¹⁾ himself a Pythagorean. Ritson expressed his gratitude to Phillips by the following complimentary allusion, page 201: 'Mister Richard Phillips, the publisher of this compilation, a lusty, healthy, active, and well-looking man, has desisted from animal for upward of twenty years.'

Of the ten chapters in the book the first, 'Of Man', and the last, 'Humanity', stand somewhat in the relation of prologue and epilogue to the body of the work. In the prologue he relates the various accounts of the origin of man from Homer to the 'sensible and eloquent Rousseau', omitting the biblical account. The original man was the same as, if not identical with, the orang-^{outang.}²⁾

1. Richard Phillips (1767-1840) was a radical whose shop became headquarters for the advanced democratic literature of the revolutionary epoch. His 'Golden Rules of Social Philosophy', 1826, contains among other things, 'The Author's reasons for not eating animal food.'

2. In foreshadowing the later theory of the origin of man and his descent or ascent from the lower forms Ritson had been anticipated by James Burnett, Lord Monboddo, (1714-1799) in his six-volume work 'On the Origin and Progress of Language', 1773-93. (See also Knight, 'Lord Monboddo and some of his contemporaries', 1900). It seems hardly probable that Ritson did not know this publication, although he makes no allusion to it. He quotes frequently from 'The Philosophy of Natural History', 1790-9, of Burnett's friend William Smellie (1740-1795).

Through the centuries of so-called civilization he had retained the destructive traits of his forbears, and had even excelled them in rapacity and cruelty. 'The dog is the natural enemy to the cat, the cat to the rat and mouse, the fox to the goose, the ferret to the rabbit, the spider to the fly: the whole animal creation being a system for the express purpose of preying upon each other, and for the mutual misery and destruction.1) Man stands at the head of this great system of cruelty and ferocity, whereas, by the very fact that he is man he ought to be superior to these purely animal characteristics. 'The only mode in which man can be useful or happy, with respect either to the generality or to the individual, is to be just, mild, merciful, benevolent, humane, or, at least, innocent and harmless, whether such qualities be natural or not; but if the present system of bloodshed, cruelty, malignance, and mischief, should continue, it would be better that such diabolical monsters should cease to exist.'2)

By this high-sounding arraignment of man's sins Ritson means simply to condemn his habit of eating animal food - this is the root of all evil. It is the 'cause of cruelty and ferocity'3) 'of human sacrifices'4) , and 'of cannibalism'5). Besides, animal food is not natural to man. There are flesh-eating animals to be

1. 'Abstinence from Animal Food', p.38.

2. Ibid, p.40.

3. Chapter IV.

4. Chapter V.

5. Chapter VI.

sure, but these, Ritson says, are the extremely vicious, and they possess these reprehensible traits as a result of their carnivorous appetites, not as a cause of them. Man, being naturally a more gentle animal, has corrupted and vitiated himself by indulgence in flesh, and has consequently taken on the attributes of the worst animals. But Ritson feels that his arguments of the evil consequences of animal food will not be sufficient to effect a reform because people have come to believe, or to pretend that they believe, animal food necessary to the highest bodily and intellectual vigor. And so he devotes a chapter to proving 'animal food not necessary for the purpose of strength and comulency'.¹⁾ His method is the eclectic one of citing cases of vegetarians who were notably strong and healthy. But this is only one half the picture: animal food is declared to be positively 'pernicious',²⁾ and 'health, spirits, and quickness of perception' are said to be 'promoted by a vegetable diet'.³⁾ From a number of cases in which intractable diseases were cured by a vegetable diet - and these examples could no doubt then, and certainly could now, be multiplied almost indefinitely - Ritson inferred that animal food was the cause of the ailment and that a vegetarian diet would have prevented it. It did not occur to him that it was not the use of animal food but the improper use of all food (as many of his medical authorities expressly stated)⁴⁾ which was to be censured. Nor did ^{he} _^

1. Chapter III.
2. Chapter VII.
3. Chapter VIII.
4. Page 148 ff.

experience difficulty in generalizing from individuals to 'nations subsisting entirely on vegetable food.' 1) Reduced to their logical absurdity his arguments would deny health and peace of mind to those individuals, and prosperity and advancement to those nations, who indulged in animal food. This volume is the final outcome of his early advice to Frank on the morality of abstinence, but the condition of his mind or his own wilfulness had prevented his seeing the absurdity of his conclusions. He constantly harks back to the sacredness of every form of animal life, and the epilogue to this erratic volume is very properly 'Humanity'. 'If god made man', he concludes, 'or there be any intention in nature', the lives of the animals over which he considers himself master, 'are equally sacred and inviolable with his own'.

This 'Essay' was greeted by the Reviewers 2) with shouts

1. Chapter IX.

2. Crit. Review, 38.16-17; Gent's Mag. 73.ii.95; Monthly Review, 123.40-5; British Critic, Nov. 1803; Edin. Review, 2.128-136. This last was a severely caustic article prepared by Lord Brougham and Sydney Smith - see Moore's 'Correspondence', VII.13.

The following lampoon from the St. James Chronicle June 3, 1783, shows the publicity which Ritson's dietetical eccentricity had gained within a short time after his arrival in London.

The Pythagorean Critick.

By wise Pythagoras taught, young R-s-n's meals
 With bloody viands never are defil'd;
 For Quadruped, for Bird, for Fish he feels:
 His board ne'er smokes with roast meat, or with boil'd.
 In this one instance, pious, mild, and tame,
 He's surely in another a great sinner:
 For Man, cries R-s-n, Man's alone my game!
 On him I make a most delicious dinner.
 To venison and to partridge I've no Gout;
 To W-rt-n Tom such dainties I resign:
 Give me plump St-v-ns, and large J-hns-n too,
 And take your turkey and your savory chine.

of laughter and boots of derision: with levity at the absurdity of the arguments, with scorn for his anti-Christian sentiments. There was nowhere a kindly word for the author except one of pitying condescension at the insane lengths to which he attempted to push his theories.

The illness from which Ritson suffered with only brief intervals of respite during the last decade of his life may have had its origin in a constitutional or hereditary malady, but there can be no doubt that it was greatly aggravated by his diet. If, as he said, it was 'an inveterate scurvy' which affected him, nothing could have been more suicidal than limitation to a restricted and uniform diet through many years. By 1795 he began constantly to complain of ill health: nervousness, insomnia, inanition. His malady grew constantly more distressing until he all but ceased his literary labors. In January 1802 he suffered a stroke of apoplexy and was thought to be dying in the twenty-four hours he was deprived of all mental and physical faculties. Apropos of this event he remarked stoically: 'the next attack, I suppose will carry me off.'¹) In the spring of this year when he was planning a trip to Paris, he was visited by a second attack, and when partly recovered from it went to Bath for a month where he received some alleviation but brought back with him, in addition to the malady he had taken there, an incurable disease from which he suffered the remainder of his days.²)

In Lamb's 'The Pawnbroker's Daughter', I.ii, 'Cutlet' and emotional butcher, sentimentalizes in a highly ludicrous fashion over Ritson's 'Animal Food'. (Works V. 212 ff.

1. 'Letters', II.215.

2. Ibid, II.229.

To bodily illness was added pecuniary distress. It was at this time that his ill-advised speculation in the Stock Exchange utterly ruined him. To retrieve in a measure, his lost fortune he disposed of his remaining property and with great reluctance, sold a few of his books.¹⁾ The following summer he was obliged to part with two other sections of his library.²⁾ Early in September he became violent, barricaded himself in his chambers, set fire to many books and manuscripts, and drove off in a threatening manner all who approached him. Only one person had influence with him in these paroxysms. This was Robert Smith, a part of whose first-hand account of Ritson's last days will be given in his own words.³⁾

'On the 10th of September about nine o'clock in the evening, on my return to Chambers, my servant told me that Mr. Ritson had been making a great noise, and that there was a great light in his room, which had alarmed the people in the Steward's office. I went immediately to the Steward's office, and looking from his window I saw Mr. Ritson's room strewn with books and loose papers, some of which he was gathering and throwing on the fire, which occasioned the great blaze, they had seen. He had

1. This was in a miscellaneous sale at King's Auction Room in King St. Covent Garden, and the exact date is not known.

2. May 4-10, 1803. An anonymous sale by Leigh and Sotheby described as property of a wellknown collector, consisting of English history, old English poetry, Plays, etc.; and August 10, 1803, a further part at King's in the third day of the sale of Dr. Mitchell's books.

3. This narrative was drawn up for Bishop Percy, who alludes to it in a letter to Anderson May 1805, 'Literary Illustrations', VII, 142, 153. For the complete account see Appendix B.



a lighted candle in his hand which he carried about in a very dangerous manner. The Steward not being at home I sent for him to represent to him Mr. Ritson's extraordinary conduct: however, being much alarmed, I went to Mr. Ritson's chambers, and knocked at the door several times, but could get no admission. At last a key was obtained from the Laundress, and Mr. Quin, the Steward and myself with two porters entered his chambers. He appeared much confused on seeing us, and asked how we came in? We told him by means of the Laundress's Key. He then asked what we wanted? Mr. Quin told him we came in answer to the great blaze that appeared in his Chambers, believing them to be on fire! He answered that his fire had gone out, and that he was lighting it to make Horse-reddish tea.

Mr Quin then represented to him the great danger of making his fire with loose papers, particularly as there were so many scattered about the room, some of which had actually taken fire! Mr. Quin therefore begged he would permit the porters to collect them together and put them away, and to do anything he wanted: upon which he said No! No! and in the most peremptory manner ordered them to leave his Chambers, saying they were only servants to the Society and had no business in his Chambers. Mr. Quin observed that consistent with his duty as Steward of the Inn he could not leave his Chambers in that dangerous situation. Mr. Ritson, then, appearing much enraged, swore he would make him, for that they came to rob him, and immediately went to his bedroom and returned with a drawn dagger in his hand, at sight of which Mr. Quin and the porters immediately left the chambers, Mr. Ritson

nursuing them along the passage; and they in their hurry, shut the outer door, leaving me in the room. On his return I disarmed him, and begged him to sit down while I explained everything. He was then very complaisant, and said he did not mean to offend me, but swore Vengeance against those who had left the room. He insisted on my going into his best apartment, which I did and found his books and papers scattered about on the floor as they were in the other chamber; he asked me to drink with him but I refused. He paid me some compliments as a neighbor, and said he would give me a history of his life. He told me he had a great passion for books of which he possessed the finest collection in England; that he had written upon many subjects and had confuted many who had written on Law and Theology. He said he was then writing a pamphlet proving Jesus Christ an impostor but something had lately discomposed him and he was therefore resolved to destroy many of his manuscripts for which purpose he was then sorting his manuscripts!! I heard him patiently for an hour and a half when I advised him to go to bed which he said he would do, and I left him seemingly composed. About an hour after he became very violent and outrageous, throwing his furniture about his chambers, and breaking his windows. I then went to him again and endeavored to pacify him but without effect. He had a dagger in one hand and a knife in the other, though I had taken the other dagger from him and carried it to my chambers. He raved for a considerable time, 'till being quite exhausted he went to sleep. A person was then sent for from Megsdon to take care of him who remained with him five days, and said that his derangement was incurable. I visited

him every day when he appeared very glad to see me and said 'here comes my friend who will set me at liberty' but violently abused his keeper, and said the Devil would torment him for his cruelty in keeping him so confined.'1)

Within a few days he was removed from his chambers to the country house of Sir Jonathan Miles at Hoxton, where he was attended by Dr. Temple Of Bedford-Row, and by his nephew who had hastened to him from the North. There he died at four o'clock in the morning of September 23rd, 1803. Four days later he was buried without ceremony of any kind and with the attendance of but a few personal friends,1) near the grave of his friend John Baynes, in Bunhill Fields. No stone marks his resting place, but it is stated without authority that he desired to be forgotten by the world and to that end directed that his grave be immediately leveled and left to the care of nature.2)

In accordance with the directions of his will Ritson's books were sold shortly after his decease. His law books were

1. One clause Of Ritson's Will reads: 'My most earnest request to my executor is, that my body may be interred in the burying ground of Bunhill Fields, with the least possible ceremony, attendance, or expense, without the presence of a clergyman, and my coffin being previously, carefully and effectually filled with quick lime.' The Will was not discovered until some time after Ritson's burial, but he had so frequently expressed his wishes to his nephew that all its provisions were accurately complied with except ^{that} concerning the destruction of the body.

2. See E. Field, 'Love Affairs of a Bibliomaniac', p. 93. The only support for this assertion is the following quotation appearing in a facetious letter to Thomas Hill, declining an invitation to have his portrait inserted in the Monthly Mirror (Feb. 11, 1803, Notes and Queries', 2.S. 12.222):

'Here let me live unseen, unknown,
Here unlamented let me die,
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie.'

disposed of by Leigh and Sotheby, in November 1803.1) The remainder of his library, including many rare books of medieval history and poetry, several of them plentifully supplied with his own notes, and what manuscripts had escaped the conflagration, was disposed of in the early days of December.2) Ritson's manuscripts were in demand, and the sale was attended by publishers and antiquaries 3) who purchased, and effectually secreted his 'Villare Dunelmense', 'Bibliographia Scotica', and 'Shakspeare'.

There was but slight notice taken of Ritson's decease. The European Magazine, September 25th, 1803, contained a bare statement of his death. The Gentleman's Magazine for October furnished an imperfect list of his works. The only attempt at characterization appeared in a well-written article, attributed to Godwin, in the Monthly Magazine for November.4) Percy and Scott and a few intimates remarked briefly on his departure. Scott wrote to Ellis: 'Poor Ritson is no more. All his vegetable soups and puddings have not been able to avert the evil day,5) and Caldwell'

1. With the books of John Topham, Treasurer of the Society of Antiquarians.

2. 'December 5 and three following days.'

3. See letters of Park and Hill, Addit. MSS. 20083, f. 98, 100, 122, etc.

4. Reprinted in the Monthly Mirror, May, 1805.

5. Lockhart's 'Scott', II.136. Some years later Scott composed 'The Song of One Volume More.'

'As bitter as gall, and as sharp as a razor,
And feeding on herbs as a Nebuchadnezzar,
His diet too acid, his temper too sour,
Little Ritson came out with his one volume more.'

said to Percy: 'Ritson stole away without being noticed.'¹) Percy himself took some pains to ascertain the facts of Ritson's life and the circumstances of his death, but, owing perhaps to the silence which so soon settled over his name, made no use of the material he had gathered.

1. 'Literary Illustrations', VIII.51.

CHAPTER IX.

Conclusion.

Joseph Ritson was a man of little formal education but of much learning. If the terminology of the modern business world may be transferred to the intellectual sphere, he would be called a self-made man. His schooling was brief, being limited to the grammar forms. The child of poverty, he was put to a profession when young. But he was a foster-child of the muses, and instead of confining his attention to the book of common law and the statutes he read widely and voraciously in history and medieval poetry. He read carefully and with insight and made notes in many of his books.¹⁾ As the need for extending his knowledge of his own and foreign languages became apparent he took up their study in a systematic and thoroughgoing fashion. He became proficient in Middle English and gained a familiarity with Anglo-Saxon at a time when the study of these dialects was just beginning. The thoroughness and accuracy of the extensive glossaries supplied with his collections of medieval poetry are sufficient testimony to his skill in this field. He acquired a working knowledge of Latin and French and strewed his Essays with apt quotations from writers in these tongues. It is not improbable that he attained a sufficient familiarity with Italian and Spanish to enable him to lay under contribution historical works in these languages, for he frequently

1. From a rough calculation based on the Ritson sale catalogue it appears that approximately half the volumes in his library were supplied with 'MS. notes by Mr. Ritson on separate sheets.'

alludes to and occasionally quotes from such sources. Greek he did not know. Nor was he proficient in German although the growing interest in German literature attracted his attention, and through the purchases which he made for his friend Harrison, he learned something of the new publications/in that language.¹) Although not a man of remarkably extensive linguistic knowledge, he was thorough and accurate so far as his information allowed. Above all he recognized the value of comparative study and applied his knowledge of languages to an elucidation of the ancient English and Scottish dialects.

Ritson was a prodigious worker. In spite of a constitutional disease which troubled him almost continually and frequently made writing an impossibility, he prepared upwards of seventy volumes and published half of them. These were nearly all collections of 'ancient poetry, songs, and ballads', and the collecting, verifying, annotating, and glossing was the painstaking labor of a life-time. He was able to work with great concentration, and was aided by a wonderfully retentive memory which seldom failed him until illness had thoroughly undermined his bodily strength.

In addition to his labor in collecting and publishing Ritson was under the necessity of earning a livelihood. Only a few, and those the least expensive, of his publications paid for themselves. The profession of Conveyancing to which he was bred,

1. Ritson secured many volumes on German Grammar for Harrison. On his visit to France he took particular notice of German works on the shelves of the Paris booksellers, and brought back a play for his friend. See 'Letters', I. 204-5 and passim.

was never of primary concern to him. He used it as a bread-and-butter profession. But even so, his thoroughgoing habits and conscientious scruples caused him to master this subject thoroughly and enabled him to publish some valuable antiquarian tracts on his office and the profession in general and gave him a respectable rank among the practitioners of his day.

Ritson's native field of labor was the Middle Ages. Half of his publications were collections of ballads, romances, and old songs. When his first collection appeared in 1783, the general interest in old poetry aroused by the 'Reliques' had gained considerable headway. Volumes of ballads, and 'ancient poems' were appearing with some degree of regularity. Ritson joined the ranks of the literary gleaners and devoted a large part of the remaining years of his life to gathering up the scattered remnants of song and story which were dispersed in unknown and forgotten manuscripts or which held an uncertain tenure of life in the oral tradition of a people rapidly acquiring habits of communication by the written word. In his efforts to rescue from oblivion and possible destruction these reliques of antiquity he materially aided the romantic movement. If he was not a solitary fore-runner of his age in recognizing the necessity for collecting popular poetry, his companions were very few. In the mere volume of the material which he amassed he exceeded any other man of his day. But it is not alone the matter which he collected but the manner in which he handled it that makes him the most important figure in ballad collecting and editing between Percy and Scott.

It is always hazardous to designate any one man as the originator of a movement in literature. But in the sense of his being one of the first to practise editorial accuracy and the very first to insist upon it with such vehemence that others rectified their errors and confessedly stood in awe of his wrath, Ritson may be called the founder of modern textual criticism. He did not go the whole way to the present 'critical text', but he took the first essential step of insisting on accuracy and fidelity. He taught his generation to respect the literary remains of departed authors - instead of considering them as a legitimate plunder to be exploited, altered, and 'improved' at will. In short, he taught men to speak the truth as they found it, even though the truth might be deemed offensive in the ear of a 'cultivated age'. Detesting fraud and deception in the literary as in the business world he would visit upon ^{the} one as condign a punishment as upon the other. In his admiration for truth he went to ridiculous extremes in carping and faultfinding, but no one can now doubt the value in his time of the line from Boileau which he took for the motto of his first publication, and which represents his standard throughout all his editorial labors:

Rien n'est beau que LE VRAI: le vrai seul est aimable.
 Without fidelity to sources, and accuracy in transcribing ^{in the early years of ballad collecting,} many a 'critical' text would now be an impossibility. Pinkerton and Percy might have gone on indefinitely publishing 'ancient' poetry; meanwhile the truly 'ancient' poetry would have become more and more remote and much of it must eventually have been irretrievably lost.

The antiquarian interest in old poetry was comparatively a recent development, and with it came a renewed curiosity in racial and national history. The English people began to inquire into the sources of their history and language and to attempt to establish their kinship with other nations. To the confused theories and faulty generalizations of the early investigators in this field Ritson applied his test of historical accuracy. He reduced the vagaries of Pinkerton to definite fact and assembled the historical materials from which accurate deductions could be made. In the revival of interest in local antiquities Ritson also had a part. He collected the songs of various northern localities, contributed to antiquarian histories, and made collections for his own history of Durham. But his service to antiquarianism in these various lines was not acknowledged. His unfortunate vein of acerbity, which manifested itself in nearly every thing he wrote, aroused personal jealousies which barred him from membership in the Antiquarian Society.

Ritson was for travelling the unbeaten paths. At a time when it had not yet become fashionable to be 'different', and in a day when the number of those who ran counter to prevailing customs and ideas was very small, he was marked as a romanticist because of his Jacobinism and atheism, and because he advocated a unique system of spelling and adhered to the fad of vegetarianism. The desire to differentiate himself from the generality of mankind was due in large measure to personal whim but in part also to a deep-seated dissatisfaction with his time. His own day he looked upon as degenerate in politics, in morals, and in literature.

For an antidote he looked to the remote past and took pleasure in retrieving and illustrating the reliques of departed genius.

Ritson had his faults and they were grievous. An unusual acidity of temper was exhibited in all his criticisms. He indulged a violence of language and a crude directness of speech which almost invariably gave offense. He was at odds with Warton and Shakespeare's editors, with Percy and Pinkerton, and he warred continually with the Reviewers. He seemed in his own person to feel severely any attack: and from the pain thus acutely experienced he might have learned mercy, but did not. He was despised as a critic, though admired as a scholar. In all his writings, he appeared cold, cynical and unfeeling. Because he exhibited little poetic temper, because he judged verses by their antiquity and not by their intrinsic merits, he was stigmatized as pedantic. The unfavorable opinions of contemporaries was confirmed by Ritson's habits of life. His circle of acquaintance was not large and he made no efforts to increase it. He knew Farmer, Reed, Steevens, Scott and many less prominent persons, but his attacks upon Warton, Percy, Johnson, and others effectually cut him off from intercourse with them and with most of their friends. ~~His habits of life~~ ^{He lived the} ~~served further to isolate him.~~ ^{life of a recluse.} He was never seen in court and seldom encountered outside his chambers. He had little communication with those who lived about him and hardly knew the members of his own Inn. Every day, his neat, spare figure might be seen moving rapidly from Gray's Inn to the British Museum, and later back again. If one accosted him he spoke briefly, even snappishly

while he moved about nervously and cast furtive glances in all directions as if seeking means of escape. This daily walk was the extent of his exercise. At vacation time he slipped quietly away from London and spent a few weeks with friends and relatives in the North. These journeys were usually taken on foot, probably for the double purpose of reducing expenses and of securing the seclusion which he so much prized.

But there was another side to Ritson's nature. Unattractive as he was to the stranger and repellant as he might be to the chance acquaintance, to his family and few intimate friends he was singularly kind, generous, and warm-hearted. His devotion to his father and mother and after their death to his sister and her son was sincere and disinterested. Those who knew him intimately say that when once in the seclusion of his Chambers he became a lively and unreserved conversationalist. Although he was given to disputation and was tenacious of his own opinions, yet he was always open to conviction, and when once persuaded of error he was quick to make frank reparation.

It is not known that Ritson ever sat for a portrait. He declined a request for an 'original portrait' to be inserted in the Monthly Mirror, remarking facetiously: 'I have no painting but an original of Ben Johnson.'¹) There is a silhouette in profile by Mrs. Park, which gives only a vague suggestion of his appearance.²) A half-length sketch by Gillray has been twice

1. Ritson to T. Hill, Feb. 17. 1803, 'Notes and Queries', 2.S.¹² 222.
2. See 'Caledonian Muse', and Haslewood's 'Life'.

coned with the subject in slightly different positions. In one he is represented as standing, quill in hand, before a table on which lies a book of poems:¹⁾ in the other he is before his bookshelves on which may be seen, among other volumes, 'Shakespeare', 'Metrical Romances', 'Warton's English Poetry', 'Bible', and 'Abstinence from Animal Food as a Moral Duty.'²⁾ He is dressed in a long black coat closely buttoned about his thin form, and wears a high hat well down on his head. The forehead is bold, indicative of large intellectuality; the thin, pale face suggests inadequate nourishment. The large bright eyes seem fixed on some remote object. The nose is large and the lower lip protrudes from a set and determinate jaw. The head is inclined slightly forward and the shoulders are stooped from continued poring over books and manuscripts. But this is more of a caricature than a true portrait, say those who knew him personally. Gillray's sketch gives an inadequate conception of 'the little neat old man, in his suit of customary black, with his gray hair and pale delicate complexion, tinged with 'Time's first rose.' He should have been taken in his evening chair, cheerfully chirruping some old saw or bardish rhyme.'³⁾

1. See 'Lit. Illusts.', III, 775, and Chambers, 'Book of Days', II, 405.

2. A print published by 'E. Baldwyn, Sutherland Street', inserted in my copy of 'Abstinence from Animal Food.'

3. Surtees, 'History of Durham', III, 195, note(y).

APPENDIX A.

Eight Unpublished Letters of Joseph Ritson.

(MS. Montagu d. 15, Bodleian.)

Stockton Friday

-th Augt. 1772.

Dear Sir

The pleasure I received from your agreeable favor was a little dammed by your treating as Flattery the most sincere Expressions my pen could commit to paper -

I can have small hopes of enjoying the least share in your Thoughts when you will not believe me if I sneak Truth - But I had rather that you should tell me I lye than a 1000 others I could name should commend me for sneaking Truth -

As to your Expectations of seeing Lanc. and me at Durham in the Race Week - I am sorry they had so bad a foundation - The pleasure I would have received from seeing you would have abundantly compensated for any trouble I might have been at in the Journey - But as I have never had a Day nor the Offer of a Day (except Sunday) from my Master/since I entered his office, I never could have expected to succeed had I asked him - I believe Lanc. is much in the same Situation - Yet I hope (as it is likely we shall have Races) I shall enjoy that pleasure before Christmas - & if you are not inrolled in the List of ye Racing performers I have a little Expectation of seeing you at Whitby then -

I am exceedingly glad your Benefit at Darlington turned out to your Satisfaction - You say 'you have often Experienced the friendship of Darlington as well as Stockton' - long very long may you continue to enjoy the Friendship of both - Tho' merit is seldom rewarded so well as it should be - Yet the place must be a damn'd stupid one indeed to let it be neglected.

We have had the 'famous and ummaralleled' Mr. Jonas the Jugler here - his Visit indeed was only short but as he performs his Part much better than any other Pretender to the Art - the Spectators are as much pleased as astonished -

There is not the least Necessity for the Letters you honor me with ' to be left at Mrs. Barkers' - Directed to - J. Ritson at Ra: Bradley's Esqr Stockton they will be much sooner received as I seldom know there is a Letter till three or four Days afterwds. -

My imagination's so shallow, it is the most vain Undertaking possible, for me to pretend corresponding with you - Yet if my stupid Letters have only the good fortune to procure one in return - I am happier than if I were the Author of Mr. Pope's Literary Correspondence -

I am

Dear Sir

With the greatest Respect

Your most humble Servant

J Ritson Jun.

(No address. Written to John Cunningham.)

(MS. owned by Mr. Marsden J. Perry, Providence, R.I.)

Dear Sir,

I plainly perceive that the little pamphlet I have published will be productive of a consequence which it must be evident I have sought to avoid, & for which I shall be very sorry.

That I have ever thought & said that the notes at which I have taken offense could not possibly proceed from you is a fact well known - I declared my belief of it to yourself in the letter I wrote soon after the publication of your Shakespeare; - you could then, I thought, so easily have undeceived me, that your silence tended to authorize & confirm my belief. I cannot however doubt the assertion you now make - but I am more & more at a loss to account for the language & manner of your notes which so far as you were personally concerned were without the least provocation on my side & could not fail to give the most unfavorable impression of my character to every one who knew who was meant by the Author of the Remarks. - It would surely have been generous & friendly at the least to have afforded me an opportunity of defending myself against the charges you thought me liable to, before the publication of the book, that I might have had a chance of convincing you that the Remarks objected to were neither so false nor so foolish as they are there represented. You adopted a mode of conduct which it would have been perfectly natural for me to expect from Mr. Warton or Mr. Malone but certainly not from you.

I have no intention whatever of troubling the public with any thing more upon the subject - My only wish was to justify myself which I hope I have done to the satisfaction of every unprejudiced person.

You will do me the justice to believe that I never entertained the most distant suspicions of your having any concern in the scurrilous libel you allude to - but both Baynes & I were very much surprised to see it noticed in your list which we concluded it would not have been if you were unacquainted with its contents, & which it was equally difficult to conceive why it should have been if you were not.

I should consider myself a person of neither honor or honesty if I had been actuated in this publication by the least spark of resentment against you & I beg leave to assure you that notwithstanding what has passed I shall still continue to preserve the respect & esteem to which your personal character & literary services have so just a claim.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Your very obliged & obed. serv.

Grays Inn,

J Ritson.

22d. Feb. 1788.

(No address. Written to Isaac Reed.)

(MS. Laing, II, 124. University of Edinburgh Library.)

No. 104 Caser(?) -
 X 435 Dissertatio -
 603 Tristan -
 808 } Hailes
 809 }
 903 A proper project -
 X 2413 Noble -
 X 2619 Colville -
 5655 Sibbaldi -

Grays Inn, 20th Novr. 1793.

My good friend,

I have purposed writing to you for some time, but as you would have got nothing by it, you will think it just as well perhaps that i have deferred my letter till it became productive of some little advantage. I am vexed, at the same time, that i could not write yesterday, as most likely such of the above numbers as i wish most to see are already disposed of. I dare not mention Sibbald, as in the first place i suspect it not to be complete, and secondly, i am terrified at the idea of your unexpressed & inconceivable charge. You may put up the few articles you send me (if not too late) in Egertons parcel; & i will pay the charge into your account with them. I will also pay them if agreeable to you, the sum of ~~ten~~ guineas which you will be so good as to pay over to Mr. Allan, to whom i write by this post. My book is nearly ready for publication, & will certainly appear by or about Christmas. I have not taken the liberty to put your name to it, for which, i take it, on a perusal of the introduction, you will think yourself not a little obliged to me. I cannot easily reconcile your assurance of the sale of a number of copies with

your indetermination to take one. The expense of sending a parcel to Edinburgh may be no great object, but to have it returned entire is what i should not like: so that if you will answer for 50 i will send you 100, if 25, 50, if 10, 20, if 5, 10, if none, not one, sat verbum.

I am much obliged to Mr. Brown, & request whenever you meet him you will exert your eloquence in remembering my friendship & respect. I am much chagrined at the fate of my King Charles snurs, which were really curious, as well as at the loss of Mr. Patons parcel. Please to present my best compliments to that worthy man & say that i mean to have the pleasure of writing to him in a little time. I must give up, i find, all expectation of becoming acquainted with the old volume which has given all of us so much trouble. I sometimes think of addressing myself directly to the dean, but 'the insolence of office' would most probably prevent him from paying any attention to my request.

Pray why have i never heard anything further of the Edinburgh catalogue? It would be of great use to me in a work i am now amused with; & which i mean to be a kind of a sort of a Scottish library of historians & poets. In this, which i think i must come down to finish & print in Edinburgh, you would be of no little service. Who or what is Robert Colvelie? Can you get me the two (or more) poems he has published?

I am,

Your sincere friend & well-wisher,

J. Ritson.

(Addressed to Wm. Laing, Bookseller.)

(MS. Montagu d. 15, Bodleian.)

Dear Sir,

If the books mentioned in the inclosed paper be in your own library, as I presume they are, I shall be highly gratified by the perusal of such of them as you can conveniently spare. They shall be treated with care, & returned with expedition.

Yours respectfully

J Ritson

Monday, 6th Feb.

1797. -

- x 1. Derickes Image of Ireland. 1581.
- 2. Bellots English Schoolmaster. 1579.
- x 3. Bullokars Orthographie. 1580.
- 4. Mulcasters Elementarie. 1582.
- x 5. Grammatica Anglicana. 1594.
- x 6. Spensers Three Letters. 1580.
- x 7. Blages Wise conceytes. 1569.

(Addressed to George Chalmers, esq.)

(Additional MS. 22900. f, 404, British Museum.)

Dear Sir,

Understanding that you have purchased Wm. Herberts transcript of the Stationers-books, I presume upon your experienced liberality to solicit the loan, for a few days, of the first volume, either now or when you can better spare it; with liberty, if you please, to extract such entries of ballads as Herbert has not already printed.

I am,

Dear sir,

Very respectfully & sincerely yours,

J. Ritson.

Grays Inn,

15th Dec. 98.

(Addressed to George Chalmers esquire, Green-street.)



(MS. Montagu d.15, Bodleian.)

Grays Inn, 20th Decem. 1798.

Dear Sir,

I return your first volume, with a thousand thanks; and flatter myself it has not been detained beyond your expectation. As you appear not to have finished your examination of the second, perhaps you could part with it more conveniently at a future time, for which I should wait with pleasure. If, however, the present be equally agreeable, you may rely on the ^{utmost} ~~ultimate~~ dispatch from,

Dear sir,

Very sincerely yours,

J. Ritson

P.S. 'The clarkes booke', I perceive, wch containes the entrys from 22d July 1571 to 1576, is still missing: nor now likely, I conclude, ever to be found. Another book, with a white cover, occasionally refer'd to, is, doubtless, in the same predicament.

(Addressed to George Chalmers esquire, Green-street.)

(Additional MS. 22901. f,13, British Museum.)

Dear Sir,

I return you the concluding volumes of Wm. Herberts transcript, & shall ever retain the most grateful sense of so considerable a favour.

Upon Mr. Steevens's application to I know not what members of the stationers company, they agreed to let me have the use of these books in ~~the~~ their own hall, but had determined, it seems, that they should no more go abroad into private hands. As the terms were inconvenient, I did not accept the offer, & ~~and~~ have thereby had an opportunity of being much more pleasantly indebted to your superior liberality.

I remain,

Dear sir,

Your most obliged & respectful
humble servant,

J. Ritson.

Grays Inn,

29th Jany. 1799.

(No address. Written to George Chalmers.)

(MS. Laing. II. 589, University of Edinburgh Library.)

Dear Sir,

The romance of Sir Tristem, if admitted to be the production of Thomas of Ercildon, i may be well enough said to have discovered, as i know of none who had anticipated my conjecture, though i have not been permitted to announce that discovery myself. It is extant in a most valuable, but shockingly mutilated, MS. in the library of the faculty of advocates at Edinburgh, marked W. 4.1. and presented by the late lord Auchenleck, in 1744; its age, to the best of my judgement, being about the year 1400, and, evidently compiled and written in England. The reasons from which i infer this imperfect romance to be the work of the ancient Scottish bard already mentioned are these: Robert of Brunne, in the prologue to his metrical version of Peter Langetoft, says,

'I see in song in sedgeyng tale
Of Erceldoun, & of Kendale,
Non tham says as that tham wroght,
& in ther saying it semes noght.
That may thou here in Sir Tristem,
Over gastes it has the steem,
Over all that is or was,
If men it sayd as made Thomas.

But I here it no man so say,
That of som copple is away.
So tharefare saying here beforne,
Is thare travayle here forlorne.

.
Thai sayd in so quaynte Inglis,
That many one wate not what is,
Therefore hevved wele the more
In strange ryme to travayle sore.'

I shall now proceed to gratify your curiosity, by a transcript of the first stanza, which will serve at the same time, to illustrate the censure of the English critick, and to ascertain the title of the Scottish poet. It runs thus:

'I was at Ercildoun (to supply, by conjecture, what is
 With Thomas spak y thare, illegible)
 Ther herd y rede in rounne,
 Who Tristem eat & bare,
 Who was king with croun,
 And who him fostered zare,
 And who was bold baroun,
 As thair elders ware
 Ri zere:
Tomas telles in toun
 This aventours as thai were'.

This is a specimen of such 'quayhte Inglis,' and such strange ryme', as there is no other instance of; and, with the other extracts, I have made from this venerable relique (which, by the way, I had neither time nor convenience to transcribe at length), sufficiently proves, at least to my own conviction, that this is the identical poem alluded to in the above passage of Robert Manning. In further support of the authorship, I can also cite the fragment of an ancient romance in French metre upon the same subject, in the possession of Mr. Douce, in which the Scotch-English performance is apparently criticised under the name of Thomas. The objection made, by some, against this opinion, is, that the poem speaks of Thomas, in the third person, as one from whom he states himself to have received his materials: but for this singularity (if it be one), the authors caprice must be responsible. It seems, in fact, to have been, if not the peculiar, at least the notorious practice, of this popular rimer: as, in two more modern poems, always ascribed to, but not, I believe, actually

written by him, he is introduced in the same manner: one of these mentioned by Lord Hailes, you most probably have in the Scottish prophecys, the other, an imperfect MS. in the Cotton library, & Lincoln cathedral, has not been printed. Beside, Maistre Wace, more than once, sneaks of himself in the same manner, tho' at other times in the first person; and this identical objection is alledged, by Bishop Watson, against the cavils of Thomas Paine, as a strong argument in favour of the four evangelists, after the example of Caesar, Xenophon, and other ancient historians: which is all i have at present to say upon the subject. I understand, however, that some gentlemen, at Edinburgh, have transcribed the entire poem for the purpose of publication, which i should, in fact, have done myself, tho' without the like advantages, had it not been mutilated and imperfect.

I put into your hands a few years ago an alphabetical list of the names of British rivers, which, if it would be of any service to you, and has already performed it, i should be obliged to you to leave for me at Egertons any time it may be convenient.

I am,

Dear sir,

Very respectfully & sincerely yours,

J. Ritson.

Grays Inn,

26th June 1801.

(No address.

APPENDIX B.

A Manuscript narrative of Joseph Ritson's last days and death, together with two unpublished letters of H.C.Selby to Bishop Percy.

(MS. owned by Mr. C.Davis of Kew Gardens, Surrey.)

Narrative of Robt. Smith Esq. Benchor of Grays Inn.

The late Mr. Ritson lived in the same Staircase with me for many years, and the common civilities of the Day passed between us , but nothing more- We never visited - I understood he possessed a great Singularity of Character, but he was ever polite and civil to me - Early in September 1803 - I frequently heard a great Swearing and Noise in his Chambers, and on meeting his Laundress on the Stairs, I asked her ye cause of the Disturbance I had heard - She answered, that she believed her Master was out of his Mind, for his conduct in every respect proved him so - and that she was greatly afraid that in his Delirium he would do himself or her an Injury - She said she had taken him his Dinner the Day before, but that he had not touched it and that he never ate animal Food - She was then going to him, but expressed a Fear that he would burst into a Rage and abuse her as I had heard him before - The last time she was in his Chambers he had shut himself up; however she left his Dinner on the Table, and was then going to see if he had ate it - I said as she had expressed herself fearful I would go with her to her Master, which I accordingly did.

I saw his Dinner on the Table, but he was still shut up in his Room - I ask'd the Laundress whether he had any relations in Town, she said he had not, but that he had a Nephew somewhere in the North who had lived with him for many Years, but that Mr. Ritson had turned him out of his House for eating animal Food - I desired her to endeavour to find out some of his Relations or Friends, and to apprize them of his unhappy Situation - and in the meantime to be very careful of him -

On the 10th of September about nine O'clock in the Evening, on my Return to Chambers, my Servant told me that Mr. Ritson had been making a great Noise, and that there was a great Light in his Room, which had alarmed the people in the Steward's office - I went immediately to the Steward's Office, and looking from his window I saw Mr. Ritson's Room strewed with Books and loose papers, some of which he was gathering up and throwing on the Fire, which occasioned the great Blaze- they had seen - He had a lighted chandle in his Hand which he carried about in a very dangerous manner - The Steward not being at home I sent for him to represent to him Mr. Ritson's extraordinary Conduct - However, being much alarmed, I went to Mr. Ritson's Chambers, and knocked at the Door several times, but could get no admission - At last a key was obtained from the Laundress, and Mr. Quin the Steward and myself with two Porters entered his Chambers - He appeared much confused on seeing us, and asked how we came in? - We told him by means of the Laundress's key - He then asked what we wanted? Mr. Quin told him we came in answer to the great Blaze that appeared in his Chambers--believing them to be on fire! He answered that his Fire had gone

out, and that he was lighting it to make Horse-reddish Tea -

Mr. Quin then represented to him the great Danger of making his Fire with loose papers, particularly as there was so many scattered about the Room, some of which had actually taken Fire! Mr. Quin therefore begged he would permit the Porters to collect them together and put them away, and to do anything he wanted - Upon which he said No! No! and in the most peremptory manner ordered them to leave his Chambers - saying they were only Servants to the Society and had no Business in his Chambers -. Mr. Quin observed that consistent with his Duty as Steward of the Inn he could not leave his Chambers in that Dangerous Situation - Mr. Ritson, then, appearing much enraged, swore he would make Him, for that they came to rob him, and immediately went to his Bed-Room - and returned with a drawn dagger in his Hand, at Sight of which Mr. Quin and the Porters immediately left the Chambers, Mr. Ritson pursuing them along the Passage - and they in their Hurry, shut the outer Door, leaving me in the Room - On his return I disarmed him, and begged him to sit down while I explained everything -. He was then very complaisant, and said he did not mean to offend me, but swore Vengeance against those who had left the Room - He insisted on my going into his best Apartment, which I did and found his Books and papers scattered on the Floor as they were in the other Chamber, he asked me to drink with him but I refused - he paid me some Compliments as a Neighbour, and said he would give me a History of his Life - He told me he had a great Passion for Books of which he possessed the finest Collection in England - That he had written upon many Subjects and had confuted many who

had written on Law and Theology - He said he was then writing a pamphlet proving Jesus Christ an imposter but that something had lately discomposed him and he was therefore resolved to destroy many of his Manuscripts for which purpose he was then sorting his Papers!!! - I heard him patiently for an hour and a half when I advised him to go to bed which he said he would do, and I left him seemingly composed - About an Hour after he became very violent and outrageous -throwing his Furniture about his Chambers, and breaking his Windows - I then went to him again and endeavoured to pacify him but without Effect- He had a Dagger in one Hand and a knife in the other - tho' I had taken the other Dagger from him and carried it to my own Chambers - He raved for a considerable time, 'till being quite exhausted (sic) he went to sleep - A person was then sent for from Mersdon to take care of him who remained with him five days, and said that his^s Derangement was incurable - I visited him every day when he appeared very glad to see me and said 'here comes my Friend who will set me at Liberty' but violently abused his keeper, and said the Devil would torment him for his Cruelty in keeping him so confined - It was thought proper by his friends to remove him to a Madhouse where I understand he died in a few days - I have since learned that his malady was a Family Disorder and that his Sister died mad -

31st March 1804.

Robt. Smith.

(MS. owned by Mr. Davis.)

Grays Inn, 6th April 1804.

My Dear Lord,

In consequence of your Lordship's letter of the 20th ult. which I was very happy to receive, as it gave me good Accounts of your Lordship's health, & that of your family, to all of whom I most sincerely wish well, I made application to my very worthy neighbour Mr. Smith, whom I knew to be an intelligent man, who lived in the same Staircase with Ritson, & was well acquainted with all his whims & eccentricities. to give me the best and most particular relation he could to satisfy your Enquiries, for which purpose I read to him that part of your Lordship's last letter to me respecting it, - Just as I was preparing to go into Essex, to pass a few Days in the Easter holidays with my Friends there, I received the foregoing report, which I hope may prove satisfactory to your Lordship - But as Mr. Smith in our conversation on the subject of Ritson's passions, prejudices, and sentiments in general, dropt some expressions which I found he had omitted in the foregoing Recital, I gave him a call yesterday, and mentioned the Circumstances to him, which he perfectly recollected, and recapitulated them to me as he had done before - He says that Ritson frequently made such a Noise and thumping in his Chambers as to disturb and alarm all his Neighbours frequently, and that on these occasions he used to go down to Ritson's Chambers, which were on the first Floor or Story, & Smith's was on the 2d. and being a strong Powerful Man, & Ritson a mere spider in comparison

to him - He used to prevail on R. either by force, or by kind persuasions to give over making such a disturbance - at these times Ritson would appear sometimes very furious, enraged and violent to a degree and after he had fatigued himself by the exertion of those horrid Passions he frequently, it seems, used to sit down, lay his hand in apathetic and in a sort of ejaculating manner on his forehead & exclaim 'Oh my God, what a miserable wretch am I!' 'My poor distracted Head!' 'When will there be an end of my distresses!' He would then start up again and act as wildly as before, until Mr. Smith who had obtained complete command over him, insisted on his going again to bed, which he always did at Mr. Smith's request.

I ask'd Smith if he believed Ritson to be an Atheist, - his Answer was, that He did not think so; -else why should he send up ejaculations to God, or talk of the Devil tormenting People whom he believed had used him very ill. Smith said that he possessed the most consummate Pride, & had the highest opinion of his own Abilities in all Sciences;- He say'd that he had had literary controversies with a great Number of Men of the First Talents in the Country, on subjects of their respective & several Studies; and that he had completely confuted them all!! As to the Benchers & Gentlemen of his Inn, they were all a parcel of Fools to him, & not worthy his Notice! He say'd he had for some time been engaged in writing the Work mentioned in Mr. Smith's Recital as before related by him- viz. 'To prove That Our Saviour Jesus Christ was an Immostor,'-but something had happened to prevent his finishing

the work, & which therefore he had not then concluded; - Whether he had been struck by conviction or by remorse, or from any and what other cause, it may be perhaps for ever impossible to say, but I understand that he consumed the Sheets, which contained what he had written on that extraordinary Subject, in the flames. I do believed that his madness originated in his Pride, in thinking himself the most learned, and Extraordinary Genius of the Age in which he lived, -and that there were few if any that were fit for him to associate with in this World: what He thought, if he thought at all, of that which is to come, it is not in my power to say not having had any sort of intercourse, or acquaintance with him.

I beg my most friendly respects to Mrs. Percy & such of your family as are with you, and that your Lordship will believe me with the truest Esteem & regard,

Ever Your's most faithfully,

H.C.Selby.

(Addressed to Bishop Percy.)

(MS. owned by Mr. Davis.)

Grays Inn, London.

14th June 1804.

My Lord!

I hope the Complaint in your eyes has been compleatly removed, which by your Lordship's last letter I observed had been very troublesome & inconvenient to you. I have lately seen Mr. Smith on the subject of your Lordship's letter to me, who has no sort of objection that a just & true Account should be given to the World, of the late Mr. Joseph Ritson's Character, Conduct & Principles, & which I conceive is very proper to be done: When I was with him (Mr. Smith) He sent for a woman of the Name of Elizabeth Kirby, who was a native of the same Town, viz. Stockton upon Tees, where Ritson drew his first breath, was about his own age, and perfectly well acquainted with him and all his family. This Mrs. Kirby informed us, that Ritson's Father was a Menial Servant to a Tobacconist at Stockton - afterwards he served a Mr. Robinson a Merchant there, at which time his mother was also a servant in the same family and was with child to the Father before he married her, & which proved to be a daughter who some time ago died of madness! Ritson went to a Latin School at Stockton, and was clever at his books, & an ant scholar; On his quitting the Latin School he was put to a Conveyancer, a Mr. Bradley of the same town, who I understand knew his business extremely well. After having remained with him for some year or two, he came up to Town: He used to take his Journeys on foot, with a couple of shirts in his

rocket, & if he found his bundle too heavy, he would, without hesitation, throw one of his shirts away! He was entered a student of the Society of Grays Inn, & after keeping his terms, & being of the proper Standing in the Inn, he was called to the Bar! in this transaction He could not but have taken the usual Oaths of Allegiance, Supremacy, etc. etc. as no person can be admitted to a Barrister without taking those Oaths. However I find by Mrs. kirby's declaration and solemn affirmation, that in taking those Oaths He must have played the hypocrite; For she says, that He most undoubtedly was an Atheist, & that He very often declared himself such to her: -He did not believe there was any such Being, as Almighty God!! or that there was any future State of Rewards or Punishments, & the greatest devil he knew, was a nasty, crabbed, ill natured old Woman!! When he was young & at School, he never associated with other boys, but always with the girls, and they never liked his company, but got rid of him as well as they could; and at last He was forsook by every body. This Mrs. Kirby is a very stout, hearty woman about 54 years of age, & she tells me that she had the complete Mastery over him, and could make him do anything she pleased, - he was so much afraid of her. - Of the rest of his History, Your Lordship already is in possession, and at liberty to make what use of it you may think proper and right.

Your Lordship has been rightly informed as to Mr. Stirling's Residence, which for some time has been at No. 44 in Parliament Street, Westminster. Neither the size of my paper, nor the Shortness of my time at present, will permit me to give your Lordship the detail of my Reconciliation but I hope we shall be permitted

to meet again in this world, when I will with pleasure give it you 'Viva Voce'. I dined at Northumberland House about three Weeks ago, with a small Party of Northumbrians, and was very cheerfully & agreeably entertained. The young ladies are very mild, easy, & good humoured - but seem more difficult than Ladies of their Rank generally do.

I beg to be most respectfully remembered to Mrs. Percy & all your Lordship's Family, and that your Lordship will believe always with great Veneration & Esteem, your Lordship's affectionate Friend, and most faithful Humble Servant

H.C.Selby.

(Addressed to The Right Reverend, The Lord Bishop of Dromore.)

APPENDIX C.

Passages Cancelled in Ritson's 'Quip Modest,' and 'Ancient English Metrical Romances.'

I. Quip Modest.

Preface, vii, n. substitute 'This worthy gentleman is probably the infamous scoundrel who published 'An Address to the curious in ancient poetry,' as, however little relation it may have to Shakespeare, the author has had interest enough to procure it a place in the 'List of Detached Pieces of Criticism, etc.' prefixed to the revised edition. A congeniality of disposition in the Critical Reviewers procured this fellow a different reception from those literary hangmen, from that which he may one day experience from a well known practical professor of the same mystery.'

II. Metrical Romances.

Vol. I.

Page ix, for line 7, substitute 'as firmly believed as the Jewish or Christian religion, the books of Moses, or the new testament.)

Page xlvi, for line 22, substitute 'like Moses, the Jew prophet, relate his own death.'

Page lx, for line 6, substitute 'in consequence of becoming Christians.'

Page lxv, for note, substitute 'The loss sustained by the vulgar of their Saxon version would have been effectually remedied by their French one, and peradventure, it would have been just as well for the Saxons if they had never had a bible to read.'

Page cxlviii, for line 1, substitute 'but he, whether wisely or not, abandoned one series of lies for another.'

Vol. III.

Page 238, after line 20, read 'They are foolish, no doubt, and unmeaning, but it is the extreme of bigotry and idiotism to consider them as wicked or punish them as criminal.'

Page 247, for line 1, substitute 'Merlin, a powerful magician, and a more clearsighted and veracious prophet than the Jew Isaiah.'

Page 247, for line 7, substitute 'were part of it by the favour of Almighty providence is still standing.'

Page 247, for line 11, substitute (Igera being like the Bathsheba of the old testament rendered

Page 248, after line 15, read, 'are fulfilling every day, like those of the old clothesmen of Judea, or the still more Merinical rhansodist of The revelation of the New Jerusalem.'

Page 321, for line 28, read 'That the christians of former ages, a most ignorant, bigoted and superstitious sect, appear to have entertained.'

Page 349, from line 5, substitute 'This was Jesus Christ, who, in the interval between his crucifixion and his ascension, made an inroad into the infernal regions and plundered them of all the damned souls he thought worth carrying off. This miraculous event, though unnoticed by the four evangelists, is nevertheless circumstantially related in The Gospel of Nicodemus; and in honest Tom Hearne's appendix to his edition of John Fordun, the Scotchman's lying chronicle, is the engraving of an ancient picturesque representation thereof, in which Christ (not Saint Patrick, as is falsely pretended by doctor Johnson, in so desperate an adventure, armed with his invincible cross, is opposed at the very mouth of hell fire, by a devil blowing a horn and exclaiming in a manner truly diabolical, 'Out out amongst.' (Refer to page 1402-3; and, for what Johnson has said, to Stevens's Shakspeare 1793, vii, 342.) It seems alluded to in the first epistle of Peter iii, 18, 19: 'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit; by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison,' and in the apostles' creed, it is expressly said 'He descended into hell.'



APPENDIX D.

I. The published Works of Joseph Ritson.

- 1772, Versees addressed to the Ladies of Stockton, First printed in the Newcastle Miscellany, 1772.
Reprinted at Newcastle, n.d.
Again, in Haslewood's 'Life', 1824.
- 1776, Office of a Lord High Steward of England. London, 1776.
- 1778, The Descent of the Crown of England. Privately printed. London, 1778.
Second impression, 1783.
- 1781, The Stockton Jubilee: or, Shakespeare in all his glory. Newcastle, 1781.
- 1782, Observations on the three first volumes of the History of English Poetry in a familiar letter to the author. London, 1782.
- Fabularum Romanensium Bibliotheca: a general catalogue of old romances, French, Italian, Spanish and English. 2 vols. (A specimen of two pages of this work was all that ever appeared.)
- 1783, Remarks, critical and illustrative, on the texts and notes of the last edition of Shakespeare. London, 1783.
- A select Collection of English Songs, with their original airs: and a Historical Essay on the origin and progress of national song. 3 vols. London, 1783.
Second edition, with additional Songs and Notes, by Thomas Park, 3 vols. London, 1813.
1784. The Bishopric Garland, or Durham Minstrel. Being a choice collection of Excellent Songs relating to the above country. Stockton, 1784.
New edition corrected. Newcastle, 1792.
(Reprinted in Northern Garlands, 1810.)

- 1784, *Gammer Gurton's Garland: or the Nursery Parnassus; a choice collection of pretty songs and verses, for the amusement of all little good children who can neither read nor run.* Stockton, 1784.
Reprinted with additions. London, 1809.
- 1785, *The Spartan Manual, or Tablet of Morality.* London, 1785.
Reprinted, Glasgow, 1873.
- 1787, *The Comedy of Errors, with notes.* London, 1787.
(Two sheets only printed.)
- 1788, *The Quin Modest; a few words by way of supplement to remarks critical and illustrative, on the text and notes of the last edition of Shakspeare; occasioned by a republication of that edition, revised and augmented by the editor of Dodsleys Old Plays.* London, 1788.
- The Yorkshire Garland: being a curious collection of old and new songs concerning that famous country. Part 1, York, 1788. (never continued.)*
(Reprinted in *Northern Garlands*, 1810.)
- 1790, *Ancient Songs, from the time of king Henry the Third to the Revolution.* London, 1790. (Printed 1787; dated 1790; published 1792.)
Second edition: *Ancient Songs and Ballads from the Reign of King Henry the Second to the Revolution.*
2 vols. London, 1829.
Third edition, revised by W.C. Hazlitt; London, 1897.
- 1791, *Pieces of Ancient Popular Poetry: from authentic manuscripts and old printed copies. Adorned with cuts.* London, 1791.
Second edition, 1833.
- The Office of Constable: being an entirely new commendium of the law concerning that ancient minister for the conservation of the peace. Carefully compiled from the best authorities. With a Preface; and an Introduction, containing some account of the origin and antiquity of the office.* London, 1791.
- The Jurisdiction of the Court Leet: Exemplified in the articles which the jury or inquest for the king in that court is charged and sworn, and by law enjoined, to inquire of and present. Together with approved precedents of presentments and judgements in the Leet: and a large introduction, containing an account of the origin, nature, and present state, of this institution.* London, 1791.
Second edition, with great additions, London, 1809.
Third edition, London, 1816.

- 1792, *Cursory Criticisms on the edition of Shakespeare published by Edmond Malone.* London, 1792.

The North-Country Chorister; an unparalleled variety of excellents songs collected and published together, for general amusement by a Bishop Ballad-Singer. Durham, 1792.
Second edition, 1802.
(Reprinted in *Northern Garlands*, 1816).

Joseph Reed's Tragedy of Dido. Revised and edited by Joseph Ritson. London, 1792.

- 1793, *The Northumberland Garland: or Newcastle Nightingale: A matchless collection of famous songs.* Newcastle, 1793.
(Reprinted in *Northern Garlands*, 1810.)

The English Anthology. London, 1793. Vol. I.

- 1794, *The English Anthology.* London, 1794, Vol. II and III.

Law Tracts, by Joseph Ritson, of Gray's Inn, Barrister. London, 1794.

Contains: Office of Constable
Jurisdiction of the Court Leet
Digest of the Proceedings of the Court Leet

Scottish Songs. 2 vols. London, 1794.

(By a typographical error, Vol. I. is dated MDCCLXIV.)
Second edition, 2 vols. Glasgow, 1869.

- 1795, *Poems on interesting events in the reign of King Edward III.: written in the year MCCCCLII. by Laurence Minot, with a preface, dissertations, notes, and glossary.* London, 1795.
Second edition, *Poems, written anno MCCCCLII. by Laurence Minot. With introductory dissertations on the Scottish Wars of Edward III. on his claim to the throne of France, and notes and glossary.* London, 1825.

Robin Hood: a collection of all the ancient poems, songs, and ballads, now extant relative to that celebrated English outlaw. To which are prefixed historical anecdotes of his life. 2 vols. London, 1795.

Second edition, 1832.

Third edition, 1858.

Another edition, with a memoir of Ritson, 1840.

- 1802, *Bibliographia poetica: a catalogue of English poets, of the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centurys, with a short account of their works.* London, 1802.

- 1802, An essay on abstinence from animal food, as a moral duty.
By Joseph Ritson, London, 1802.

Ancient English Metrical Romances. 3 vols. London, 1802.
Second edition, revised by Edmund Goldsmid. 3 vols.
Edinburgh, 1884-85.
Reprinted, 3 vols. in 1, Edinburgh, 1886

- 1804, Critical Observations on the various and essential parts
of a deed. London, 1804. (Bound with Ralph Bradley's
Practical Points, or Maxims in Conveyancing.)

- 1806, Memoirs of John Hodgson, touching his conduct in the Civil
Wars, and his troubles after the Restoration. (Published
with Sir Henry Slingsby's Original Memoirs, written during
the great Civil War. Edinburgh, 1806.)

- 1810, Northern Garlands: The Bishopric Garland, or Durham Min-
strel: A choice collection of Excellent Songs: The York-
shire Garland: A curious collection of old and new Songs:
The Northumberland Garland, or Newcastle Nightingale: A
matchless Collection of famous Songs: The North-Country
Chorister, An unmaralleted Variety of excellent Songs.
Edited by the late Joseph Ritson, Esq. London, 1810.
(Each Garland with a separate title page, London, 1809.)
Second edition, London, 1887-88.

- 1811, The Office of Bailiff of a Liberty. London, 1811.

- 1821, The Caledonian Muse: a chronological selection of Scottish
poetry from the earliest times. With vignettes engraved by
Heath after the designs of Stothard. London; Printed, 1785:
and now first published, 1821.

- 1824, Some account of the Life and Publications of the late
Joseph Ritson, Esq. By Joseph Haslewood. London, 1824.

- 1825, The Life of King Arthur: from ancient historians and
authentic documents. London, 1825

- 1827, Memoirs of the Celts or Gauls. London, 1827.

- 1827-33,
Ritson's Antiquarian Works, complete with Life and Letters,
by Sir N.H. Nicolas, uniformly printed, 1827-33. 12 vols.
Contains: Ancient Songs and Ballads, 2 vols.
Robin Hood, 2 vols.
Fairy Tales, 1 vol.
Annals of the Caledonians, 2 vols.
Memoirs of the Celts, 1 vol.
Ancient Popular Poetry, 1 vol.
Life of King Arthur, 1 vol.
Letters and Life, 2 vols.

- 1828, Annals of the Caledonians, Picts, and Scots; and of Stathclyde, Cumberland, Galloway, and Murray. 2 vols. Edinburgh, 1828.
- 1829, Letters from Joseph Ritson, Esq. to Mr. George Paton. To which is added, a critique by John Pinkerton, Esq. upon Ritson's Scottish Songs. Edinburgh, 1829. (100 copies printed.)
- 1831, Fairy Tales, now first collected: to which are prefixed two dissertations: 1. On Pygmies, 2. On Fairies. London, 1831.
- 1833, The Letters of Joseph Ritson, Esq. Edited chiefly from originals in the possession of his nephew. To which is prefixed a memoir of the author by Sir Harris Nicolas. 2 vols. London, 1833.
- 1891, A dissertation on Romance and Minstrelsy. To which is appended the Ancient Metrical Romance of Ywayne and Gawain. Edinburgh, 1891.

Thomas Chestre:Launfal, Edinburgh, 1891.

II. Unpublished manuscripts of Joseph Ritson.

1. The Institution, Authority, Acts and Proceedings of Burgresses of the Savoy - Repertory of Evidence in the Duchy Office relating to Manor and Liberty of the Savoy - and other papers relative to the Hosnital, with the Views and Plans, framed and glazed, of the Savoy, etc,etc.
2. The privileges of the Duchy of Lancaster, by Charter, Statute, and Judicial Determination.
3. Precedents in Conveyancing.
4. Treatise on Conveyancing.
5. Wills drawn by the late Ralph Bradley, Esq. of Stockton in the county of Durham. 2 vols.
6. Observations and Opinions, by William Hoar of Durham, revised and corrected by Mr. Bradley.
7. Precedents, by Mr. Bradley.
8. Ancient and Modern Deeds, Charters, Grants, Surveys, and other Instruments, Writings, Extracts, etc, relating to the manor, Borough, Township, Chapelry, and Parish of Stockton in County Durham, collected and transcribed by Joseph Ritson.
9. A Glossary of obsolete or difficult words occurring in the charters granted to the duchy of Lancaster.
10. Topographical Rines.(sic)
11. A list of river names in Great Britain and Ireland, with a few etymological notes on them. (Now MS. Douce 340, Bodleian)
12. Description of the North East part of Cleveland, with notes.
13. Villare Dunelmense, the names of all the towns, villages, hamlets, castles, sea-houses, halls, granges, and other houses and buildings, having any appellation within the Bishopricks or county palatine of Durham.
14. An enquiry into the connection between the families of Bailol and Comyn in the thirteenth century.
15. An English Dictionary, intended for publication.

16. Gleanings of English Grammar, chiefly with a view to illustrate and establish a just system of orthography, upon etymological principles.
17. Extracts of Entries (chiefly of songs and ballads) in the Staioners books, from a transcript by the late W. Herbert.
18. Bibliographia Scotica, Anecdotes Biographical and Literary of Scottish Writers, Historians, and Poets, from the earliest accounts to the nineteenth Century, in two parts, intended for publication.
19. Select Scottish Poems. (MS. owned by Mr. Perry.)
20. Shakespeare, by Johnson and Steevens, 8 vols., containing a great number of MS. notes, corrections, etc, etc, together with 3 vols. of MS. by Mr. Ritson, prepared by him for the Press, intending to publish it.
21. Notes on Shakespeare, and Various Readings. (MS. now owned by Mr. Perry.)
22. Cunningham's (John) Poems, with an account of him in MS. by Mr. Ritson, and extracts from Newspapers respecting him.
23. The Poetical Works of Philip Duke of Wharton, now first collected, to which is prefixed his Grace's life. (MS. now owned by Mr. Perry.)

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VITA.

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